# THE LIMITATIONS FOR SPIRITUAL FORMATION:

# CHALLENGES IN EXPERIENCING SOLITUDE AND SILENCE

A THESIS-PROJECT

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# ABBREVIATIONS

| | |
|---|---|
| KJV | King James Version |

# ABSTRACT

This project explores solitude and silence as a spiritual discipline ordained by God and best done through individuals and in community. It has been shown that Christians in Cayman society faced challenges to practicing this discipline. The thesis includes a theological framework, literature review, and research with a small group of participants on the challenges they might face in practicing the discipline. An evaluation of the project outlined results, with a proposed Bile study series as a recommendation to improve the results. The conclusion is that solitude and silence has challenges for Christians and hence limitations for spiritual formation.

CHAPTER ONE

# THE PROBLEM AND ITS SETTING

## Introduction

This thesis-project addresses the limitations on spiritual formation, specifically the challenges faced in experiencing solitude and silence within the Church of God of Prophecy Grand Cayman, largely because of the busyness of believers in the Cayman Islands who seek to take care of the financial security of their family. God loves the world and through Jesus has made it possible for fallen humanity to be brought back into a right relationship with God the creator. Those who by faith become followers of Jesus embark on a lifelong process of spiritual formation to become Christ-like. Numerous obstacles affect, limit, or negate the accomplishment that will fit the God-designed pattern as stated in the Scriptures.

One of the challenges in exploring this question relates to defining the topic, for

> Spiritual formation has become a buzz word in evangelical circles in the last decades. However, like the word "spirituality," spiritual formation has different meanings to different people. An evangelical pastor may understand it differently from an ecumenical pastor. A theologian in a seminary may define it differently from a worker in a church. Spiritual formation may have different connotations to those from the Roman Catholic, Protestant and Orthodox traditions.[1]

There are many varying definitions of spiritual formation, and these definitions will be examined in this effort to identify the existence of solitude and silence in the lives of individuals in small group of project participants.

1. Alex Tang, "Christian Spiritual Formation," accessed October 2018, http://kairos2.com/spiritual_formation_individual.htm.

## Statement of the Problem and Setting

This thesis-project will study limitations for spiritual formation, specifically related to challenges in experiencing solitude and silence. The author believes that many leaders in the church have come under great challenges when it comes to experiencing the presence of God due to the busyness of life. Church leaders of the twenty-first century are daily buffeted by the hurried pace of life. Leaders think the faster they go, the more they get done. The more they do for God, the more mature they become; "I may be getting more tasks done at a faster pace, but my sense of why I'm doing them has faded."[2] Productivity should not be based on quantity but on quality within the Christian circles.

It is the assumption in the churches that if one sits and does nothing, that person is labeled as being lazy. The author has come to learn that this is not so; Jesus Christ was a relaxed person while he was on earth. Christian leaders fail to understand that we need God to empower us in what we are doing in the church. "Being unhurried doesn't mean being lazy, uninvolved, casual, or careless. Those four words expose our culture's false thinking: Hurry is efficient. Hurry is productive. Hurry is evidence of my importance."[3] However should the culture dictate us should Christian leaders make a difference in our culture.

Within Christian circles, the response of believers who are asked, "How are you?" often is "good," but few will say "busy." If they do, they may be stereotyped as one working for God. The author has recognized that if our focus is wrong, then what we do for God will also be pretense. The truth is, "there are times my activities as a Christian leader were vaguely intended for God, but they didn't spring from God, they weren't inspired by God, and I was not operating

2. Alan Fadling, *An Unhurried Life: Following Jesus' Rhythms of Work and Rest* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2013), 11.

3. Fadling, *Unhurried Life*, 12.

with God."[4] Many times this is what happens to Christian leaders—the busyness of social life and spiritual life has allowed us to forget to spend time with and listen to God so that we can be empowered and be led by the Holy Spirit.

In Grand Cayman, it is generally believed that if leaders show up for church after a hectic day of work, everything would be good. But did we stop to hear from God, or even spend some time with God? Christian leaders do not take the time to listen in such a way that makes sure outlook lines up with the Word of God. Within Pentecostal circles it is believed that we can listen in a community of believers. This can be true, but authentic listening to God must be first personal and then in community to be effective. In such a sense, a leader listening from a life that is not busy can reflect on what he or she has heard from God. Listening to God takes relationship; it is personal. God requires relationship even though he speaks at any time "The same God who speaks in activism and prophetic demonstration speaks in contemplation and solitude."[5]

Within Christian circles, many times leaders become weak. Anxiety and fear set in as Christian leaders lead due to the fast pace of life. There is no time to slow down and pray and spend quality time with the Lord. In the natural world a car cannot operate without gasoline; analogously, a Christian leader cannot be effective without praying. A life of prayer comes out of spending time with God and listening to him. "Christian leaders need to have a sense of where God is leading and what God is saying to his people in a particular place and a particular time."[6]

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4. Alan Fadling, *An Unhurried Leader: The Lasting Fruit of Daily Influence* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2017), 158.

5. Adam S. McHugh, *The Listening Life: Embracing Attentiveness in a World of Distractions* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2015), 56.

6. Fadling, *Unhurried Leader*, 142.

Christian leaders must embrace the reality that a ministry can be effective only through constant companionship with God through the Word and prayer.

Christians may feel good leading out of their busy lives because they are relying on their strength. How do they know when it is their strength and not strength empowered by Jesus Christ? "During those times when we serve only out of our strengths, God will often teach us that we are not to depend on our strengths, but on the God who gives us those strengths."[7]

It is therefore the author's contention that practicing the disciplines of spiritual formation is limited by the busyness of the society in which we live. This busyness can cause varied challenges in embracing solitude and silence for Christian leaders.

## Personal Testimony

I give God thanks for my early years in Cayman when I would visit church on a Sunday. But as soon as church was over, I was back to my same busyness, until that Sunday I was convicted by the Spirit of God and surrendered my life to him in January 2004. My life has been transformed. I have come to experience the love of Jesus Christ in my heart, his faithfulness, his peace and joy. The disciplines of prayer, reading the Word of God, and fasting were always encouraged by our leaders. These disciplines I practiced on an ongoing basis but just with the sense that doing them would make me grow. But there began to be an interest in studying the Word of God more deeply. I decided to go to seminary. These years earning my certificate and my master's degree opened my eyes to new revelations of God.

After completing my Master of Arts in Religion, it was my desire to go further. At this time my bishop and his wife had completed their Doctor of Ministry. I was then introduced to the Pastoral Theology in Practice track. To be honest, I was not a pastor, but I was inclined to study

7. Fadling, *Unhurried Leader*, 108.

in this track. When I applied for the track I was redirected and offered a place in the Spiritual Formation for Ministry Leaders track. I had no clue what this was about. Knowing the person I am, I decided to speak to my bishop, who explained what the track was geared toward and its completion. I then accepted the offer and was accepted as part of the May 2018 cohort.

My first residency brought greater in-depth light to me when the professor gave a definition of spiritual formation. This intrigued me, as what I was told was the complete opposite of what I was experiencing in my spiritual life. During this first year my eyes were enlightened by the Holy Spirit as to the experience we could have with spiritual reading. With what this entailed I recognized that in such a busy society as Cayman there are challenges that would be faced by believers to experience the full effect of the spiritual disciplines that are to be practiced so as to be spiritually transformed.

As a result of my studies, the usual practice of the disciplines was seen in a different light. For instance, I struggled to pray or spend sufficient time in God's presence because I was so busy. Prayer is the source of communication between the Christian believer and God. Think of a radio that is not connected to a power source. There will obviously be no power. So it is in our life as we become so busy that we cannot pray. Jesus Christ is our perfect example for the need of prayer in our lives, as Fadling states: "This consistent prayer time was a regular part of Jesus' daily life when he walked the earth. He practiced this regular rhythm of holy disengagement in the midst of even his busiest seasons of ministry engagement."[8]

Personal experience suggests that the challenges faced in Cayman's pressured society have hindered the growth of those practices that will result in Christian leaders' lives being spiritually transformed by the power of the Holy Spirit. From my observation, an individual's spiritual growth tends to be determined by that person's availability to be active in the church. It

8. Fadling, *Unhurried Life*, 95.

is with this in mind that I will focus on the spiritual discipline of solitude and silence as an aid to spiritual transformation. One can become busy doing the things of God and not spending time with God. This leads to a false hope of spiritual maturity. Spiritual maturity takes time, as it is a process and does not happen overnight. Being busy does not exemplify the state of a believer's maturity. According to Eugene Peterson, "Christian maturity is not a matter of doing more for God; it is about God doing more in and through us. Immaturity is noisy with anxiety-fueled self-importance. Maturity is quietly content to pursue a life of obedient humility."[9]

I will look at how these challenges affect the spiritual formation of a small group of individuals. The aim of this study is to explore how the practice of spiritual disciplines is affected by challenges facing the members of the Church of God of Prophecy Grand Cayman, seeking to identify what may be hindering spiritual formation. It is evident that there is a need for the practice of spiritual disciplines within our churches.

## Basic Facts about the Cayman Islands

The Cayman Islands is a multicultural society with more than two hundred churches and almost every denomination and faith-based community represented. The denominations and religions within the Islands include but are not limited to Anglican, Assemblies of God, Baptist, Catholic, Lutheran, Methodist, Moravian, non-denominational, Pentecostal, Presbyterian, Seventh Day Adventist, Jewish, and Muslim.[10]

It should be noted that throughout the week services are held at each and every one of these places of worship. However, attendance is higher on a Sunday or a Saturday. The services

9. Eugene H. Peterson, *Practice Resurrection: A Conversation on Growing Up in Christ* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010), 222-23.

10. Claire Louise McGrath, "Churches and Religious Services," Cayman Resident, accessed August 29, 2020, https://caymanresident.com/live/community/churches-religious-services.

held during the week are poorly attended by members. This poor attendance is because of the various challenges that members face on a day-to-day basis. The members who are generally affected are those who are in the Cayman Islands on work permits. In light of this fact, it is useful to mention the status of the Cayman Islands population. As of January 1, 2020, the population of Cayman Islands was estimated to be 66,698 people. This is an increase of 2.29 percent (1,491 people) compared with a population of 65,207 the year before. In 2019 the natural increase was positive, as the number of births exceeded the number of deaths by 466. Due to external immigration, the population increased by 1,025. The sex ratio of the total population was 0.990 (990 males per 1,000 females), which is lower than the global sex ratio. The global sex ratio in the world was approximately 1,016 males to 1,000 females as of 2019.[11]

The Cayman Islands is a British overseas territory. The territory consists of three islands in the Caribbean, Grand Cayman, Little Cayman, and Cayman Brac, which together total 102 square miles. With the size of the population in the Cayman Islands it is considered the second most populated British overseas territory. Grand Cayman is the largest of the three islands, with the larger part of the population.[12]

"There are over 100 different nationalities residing throughout the Cayman Islands. Roughly half are of Caymanian descent. Approximately 60% of the population is comprised of people that are two or more races. Most Caymanians practice some form of Christianity."[13]

Due to immigration of workers to the Cayman Islands, the population consists of native Caymanians, Cayman status holders, permanent residents, and work permit holders. "Cayman's

11. "Cayman Islands Population," CountryMeters, countrymeters**,** accessed August 29, 2020, https://countrymeters.info/en/Cayman_Islands.

12. "Cayman Islands Population 2021," World Population Review, accessed September 24, 2021, https://worldpopulationreview.com/countries/cayman-islands-population.

13. "Cayman Islands Population 2021."

work permit growth has always been a double-edged sword for successive governments."[14] There is always argument as it relates to work permit holders even though the income from these fees is very important for the country, work permit holders bridge the gap of a shortage of workers in different work sectors of the country. Despite these differences, the number of work permit workers increases each year.

The people who moved to the Caymans for work come from all part of the world, as stated above. The labor population consists mostly of work permit holders. The job of these permit holders consists of but is not limited to lawyers, accountants, bankers, teachers, doctors, construction workers, hospitality workers, and domestic workers. Within the Church of God of Prophecy Grand Cayman there is a diversity of different members of different working populations. There are all professions included in the congregation with the majority of the members being native Jamaicans. Statistics show that "as of November 2019, 12,788 Jamaicans were on work permits, an increase of 10.3%."[15] This country continues to supply the largest number of expatriates by nationality.

People with work permits may experience struggles as they try to be in good standing with their employers. Some work for long hours, which hinders their ability to attend church or even spend time in the presence of God. This is so not only for work permit workers but for other employees as well. Working in the Caymans can be very pressurized. There is constant busyness and a limited amount of time for slowing down.

14. "Year in Review: Population Surges amid Work Permit Growth," Cayman Compass, accessed September 24, 2021, https://www.caymancompass.com/2019/12/23/year-in-review-population-surges-amid-work-permit-growth/.

15. "Year in Review: Population Surges amid Work Permit Growth."

## Hypothesis

The hypothesis of this thesis-project is that spiritual formation will be enhanced by the practice of the discipline of solitude and silence. The challenges Christians face daily can be offset by slowing down, paying attention to our thoughts and emotions, noticing what God is saying to us, and most of all seeking him in spirit and in truth. The purpose of this thesis-project is to identify these challenges, to explore the findings, and to use that knowledge to eliminate hindrances to spiritual formation. The hypothesis meshes with the observations of Robert Lancaster Jordan:

> This thesis does not negate the efficacy or importance of other means of revelation. God's choosing to speak in silence does not displace or subordinate the role of Scripture or its proclamation in the life of the Church. If the other forms of revelation are available, why then encourage silence and solitude? The simple answer is because God makes himself available. Christians believe in a living God who abides in his children. His availability is therefore wonderfully intimate. Without the disciplines of silence and solitude, however, Christians run the risk of focusing on the noise of life instead of on God's presence and his voice. There is a second reason for becoming quiet. God's transcendence is, by definition, uncontainable. Yet humans have demonstrated a tendency to encapsulate God in dogma, church programs, and other human constructs. When Christians choose silence and solitude, they briefly set aside these other tools of the faith and let God be who he is, and allow him to say, or not say, whatever he wants.[16]

## Definitions of Spiritual Formation

Within the study of spiritual formation, one encounters varied definitions. "Christian Spirituality refers to the way in which the Christian life is understood and the explicitly devotional practices which have been developed to foster and sustain that relationship with Christ."[17] According to Simon Chan, "Spiritual Theology is the part of theology that, proceeding from the truths of divine revelation and the religious experience of individual persons, defines

16. Robert Lancaster Jordan, "Silent Submission: A Reformed Path Toward Integrative Leadership" (DMin thesis-project, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, 2002), 24.

17. Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Spirituality: An Introduction* (Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishing, 1999), 3.

the nature of the supernatural life, formulates directives for its growth and development, and explains the process by which souls advance from the beginning of the spiritual life to its full perfection."[18] In spite of the varying definitions the bottom line is that a Christian leader can truly be develop or grow through the power of the Holy Spirit there are no quick fixed for spiritual growth there are many disciplines that enables growth.

In its simplest term and without any form of complication on the process, "Spiritual Formation is the mysterious, lifelong, faith-filled process of the Holy Spirit transforming the whole person into the loving likeness of Christ to the glory of the Father as informed by the whole Word of God, in relationship with the whole people of God to fulfil the whole mission of God."[19] Mystery, yes! How can one who lived the life of the world be transformed in the image of God? Only by grace.

In other words, spiritual formation is the process by which a person who hears the Word of God and accepts and believes in Jesus Christ by faith will take on the new man. Formation is the process of being transformed in the image of God. The process is ongoing and continuous. Spiritual formation is the work of the triune God. The result of spiritual formation is for the glory of God and the good of humanity. Therefore, spiritual formation is a process in the believer's life. "Attainments are like the manna given to the Israelites in the desert, good only for a day. Past attainments do not place us in a position of merit that permits us to let up in the hot pursuit of God for today, for now."[20]

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18. Simon Chan, *Spiritual Theology: A Systematic Study of the Christian Life* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 18.

19. David Currie, "Shaped by the Word: Sola Scriptura for Spiritual Formation," chapter 5 in *Reformation Celebration: The Significance of Scripture, Grace, Faith, and Christ* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2018), 51.

20. Dallas Willard, *Renovation of the Heart: Putting on the Character of Christ* (Colorado Springs, CO.: NavPress 2012), 81.

An individual's spiritual formation will be effective when that person is totally committed to the faith he or she has in Jesus Christ (Heb 11:6). We must be at a place where we recognize that we are spiritually transformed by faith. "Spiritual formation can only begin because of the divine initiative of the Trinity through the Holy Spirit (*Sola Gratia*), centers upon the Son (*Solus Christus*), and ultimately results in bringing greater glory to the Father (*Soli Deo Gloria*). Human involvement in this process is responsive, not generative, based in trusting acceptance of and cooperation in the work of the Triune God (*Sola Fide*)."[21] Hence, the work of the Holy Spirit is important in spiritual formation. He carries out a sanctifying work in the life of the believer and produces the fruit and gifts of the Spirit.

It is interesting to note that during the process of spiritual formation the whole person is affected. "Body, mind, spirit, soul, will, heart, in effect, when the three parts of one's being is transformed there will be a difference: Intellectual, physical, spiritual, emotional, volitional, relational."[22] When we come into relationship with Christ, the old flesh is cut off by Christ. We live in this world, but we are transformed by the renewing of our minds.

## Goals of Spiritual Formation

### Transformation into the Likeness of Christ

As believers we were predestined by God. "The Christian's ultimate destiny or horizon has been fixed by God from all eternity: to be like His Son. In Romans 8:29-30 the words predestined, called, justified, glorified are in the past tense. That is because God, from His eternal perspective, sees this process as having been completed already. But still, in the march of

21. Currie, "Shaped by the Word," 51.

22. David Currie, "Dave's Attempt at Defining Spiritual Formation and Discipleship," accessed May 2018, https://sakai.gcts.edu/access/content/group/90129/Residency%201/Lectures%20_%20Presentations/Spiritual%20Formation%20Discipleship.def.18.pdf.

time, we must undergo the process of being transformed to the image of God's Son."[23] We will surely bear the likeness of Christ. First Corinthians 15:49 states, "And just as we have borne the image of the earthly man, so shall we bear the image of the heavenly man."[24]

### Experience of the Love of Christ

In Philippians 2:1-11 it is made clear that Christ emptied himself in humility and love and went to the cross for sinful man. A spiritually transformed individual will love self less, and the love of God that he has been given will now be exemplified by loving others. Therefore, spiritual transformation will require an individual to depend on the Word of God. That dependence on the Word will build believers' relationships with others both in the church and in the surrounding community with the aim of making a difference in others' lives. In fulfilling the whole mission of God there will be no segregation. John 3:16 states, "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." The operative word "whoever" reminds readers that salvation belongs to God.

## The Disciplines of Spiritual Formation

### The Word

It should be noted that reading the Word is especially important to our spiritual lives. The Bible should be read prayerfully, without any agenda, with humility, and with expectancy. The Word stands as a transformative source through the power of the Holy Spirit. In reading the

23. Earl D. Radmacher, Ronald B. Allen, and H. Wayne House, eds., *Nelson's New Illustrated Bible Commentary: Spreading the Light of God's Word into Your Life* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1999), 1441.

24. Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture references are from the New International Version.

Word one practices the presence of God. This continuous practice will enable us to want to be alone and still before the Lord, hence fostering solitude and silence.

## Prayer

Prayer is important in spiritual formation. Prayer is essential in transforming one into the image of God. In Luke 18:1 one reads, "Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up." Paul in 1 Thessalonians 5:17 states, "Pray continually." Spiritual "growth in the life of prayer involves different degrees of intimacy with God. Just as a human relationship grows in greater degrees of love, trust, commitment and so on, relationship with God grows similarly."[25] Prayer is dialoguing with God; God speaks to us when we listen. To foster a dialogue, one must listen and be still.

## Solitude and Silence

Solitude and silence is the ability to get away from external noise and be silent long enough to quiet the internal noise within us. It is a moment of being alone in a place set aside to hear the voice of God. One might think that this would never be possible, but all things are possible with Christ. More on solitude will be said in chapter 3.

## Meditation

When one see the correct definition of meditation one would have a change of mind to the practice, "meditation is the discipline we give to keeping the memory active in the act of reading. Meditation moves from looking at the words of the text to entering the world of the

25. Chan, *Spiritual Theology*, 127.

text."[26] Throughout the Scriptures God reveals himself to us according to his will and purpose in our lives. Romans 11:33 states, "Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out!" meditation should not be seen as a mystical experience but as one which aid in the transformation of the believers life.

## Worship

We are called to worship God. Spiritual transformation into the image of Christ enables the individual to take the Word of God, and while we are meditating in prayer, the Word will begin to speak to us, and this allows a time of worship to flow from within the individual's heart. When we "think of God as he is, one cannot but lapse into worship; and worship is the single most powerful force in completing and sustaining restoration in the whole person."[27]

## Reflection

This discipline involves an individual's time taken out to see what God has done for him or her through the day. This is best done at the beginning and ending of the day, according to Stephen Macchia, who states,

> In the practice and exercise of the discipline of reflection—through previewing and reviewing our days—we learn the significance of our silence before God and the end result of submission to his love and lordship. As we learn to recognize God's work in our days, we begin to see with greater clarity how his grace, power, presence, and blessing are woven throughout each new day. God is at work in every relationship and every experience we have as we abide in Christ. Preview and Review teaches the disciple to anticipate with God the many ways he delights to show himself to us as his children. As

26. Eugene H. Peterson, *Eat This Book: A Conversation in the Art of Spiritual Reading* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006), 99.

27. Willard, *Renovation of the Heart*, 107.

> we keep our eyes and ears open to his work in our midst, we celebrate his divine intervention in others' lives as well as in our own.[28]

Becoming more attentive and aware of what his doing in a believer's life is the aim of reflection. A Christian believer practices such an exercise my turning things over in their minds. It includes but not limited to journaling, taking slow walks, noticing and paying more attention to what is happening both internally and externally.

## Rest

Rest is a gift from God, and should Christian receive this gift it would make life much easier. Rest in God builds relationship and fosters God's presence. However, because of the fast paced of life here in the Cayman many Christians ignore the need for rest. Rest offers liberation but a constant going keeps one in slavery.

Apart from salvation, life is experienced as slavery. Pharaoh had to accomplish what he desired through us; he ordered taskmasters and pressured the workers with more work, and there was no rest. "That's what life was like before."[29] Thanks be to God who has delivered us from slavery! We are free, and where the Spirit of the Lord is there is liberty. Work is good, but when we work, we need to rest to absorb what God has in store for us so that we can accomplish his work both physically and spiritually. "To refuse Sabbath is in effect to spurn the gift of freedom. It is to resume willingly what we once cried out for God to deliver us from. It is choosing what

28. Stephen A. Macchia, *Becoming a Healthy Disciple: 10 Traits of a Vital Christian* (Lexington, MA: Leadership Transformation, 2013), 81.

29. Buchanan, *The Rest of God*, 89.

once we shunned. Rest, it turns out, is a condition of liberty. God calls us to live in the freedom that he won for us with his own outstretched arm. Sabbath is a refusal to go back to Egypt."[30]

## The Goals of Solitude and Silence

The goal of solitude and silence is the ability to set aside time in our busy schedules to hear from God. We pray, read the Word, and fast, but do we really sit down to hear from God? Do we recognize that our relationship is not a monologue but dialogue? Do we spend the time to listen and notice? Christian leaders will have to come to an understanding that we will have hindrances in life when practicing spiritual disciplines; however, our main focus and purpose must always be pointed to the triune God. Hence the challenges may be cultural, social, spiritual, or physical, and one enters the practice always remembering God.

## The Result of Solitude and Silence

The ongoing movement of the body can cause a strain on our health and affect our emotions and our thinking. In times of solitude and silence we are forced to place ourselves in the hands of our Maker. Rest for the body includes not only stopping the body or slowing down but also regular exercise, jogging, or taking a walk, which brings us to deep spiritual relationship with God. According to Barton, "We don't always think of caring for the body as part of our spiritual practice, but the story of Elijah confirms that many times this is where it all begins."[31] There comes a time in our spiritual life where we need to slow enough to reflect on God and to hear what he is saying. I have had the experience of going to have a body massage and the therapist asked me to relax. This came alive to me when one day as I started to practice solitude

30. Buchanan, *The Rest of God*, 89.

31. Barton, *Invitation to Solitude and Silence*, 64.

and silence. I was lying down and could hear the voice of God saying, "Let go, Lorraine, just relax." When I finally did that I felt my body was at ease. So there comes a time when we have to rest our body in the presence of the Lord. However, where there are advantages there are also challenges. These challenges include but are not limited to cultural challenges, physical challenges, relational challenges, and spiritual challenges. In the absence of noise, one might find oneself experiencing boredom, and no one likes this experience.

How often have we gone on without refuelling, becoming silent, and spending time with God? How often have we continued in our will and not the will of God in ministry? If we do not spend time with God and listen to him, we could experience burnout and need for rest. "The idea of a sabbatical developed from a two-pronged stimulus: fatigue and frustration. I was tired . . . I feel the need for some desert time—for silence, for solitude, for prayer."[32] This should not be the case where people wait to embrace rest. They become tired and frustrated but should make rest a part of their lifestyle.

The way of life in the Cayman Islands is one that seems pressurized. This is since most workers are expatriates, and to secure their jobs they work tirelessly. A car cannot run on an empty tank, nor can it run without a battery. If solitude and silence are not practiced as a spiritual discipline, it is the same way for people. Jesus Christ, while he was on earth, had to take time out from the busyness of preaching and teaching. Therefore, we too need fresh empowerment.

## What Others Have to Say

This author's intention is to look at different writers to see what they have to say on the spiritual disciplines, with the main focus on the disciplines of solitude and silence. Many

32. Eugene H. Peterson, *The Contemplative Pastor: Returning to the Art of Spiritual Direction* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1993), 144-45.

evangelical or Pentecostal believers face these challenges, and the intent is to discover some of the best solutions to overcoming the challenges one faces in practicing the disciplines of silence and solitude. The primary authors who are studied are as follows.

Father Philip G. Bochanski, a native of suburban Philadelphia, was ordained a priest for the Archdiocese of Philadelphia in 1999. In addition to several parish assignments, he has served as a high school teacher, chaplain for cloistered nuns, and spiritual director for seminarians. In 2017, he was appointed executive director of Courage International, an apostolate that provides pastoral care to men and women who experience same-sex attractions and have chosen to live a chaste life. He is an award-winning author and has published several articles, books, and audio lecture series on such topics as church history, spirituality, and pastoral care.

In *Wisdom of the Desert Fathers and Mothers: Ancient Advice for the Modern World* Bochanski explains lessons from the life of the hermits and mystics of old. The lessons to be learned are how they were able to make a complete offering of themselves to God, acquire great wisdom and insight into the spiritual life, spread this great wisdom, and how readers can bring their holiness and wisdom to bear in a busy world.[33]

Christine Valters Paintner, a Benedictine oblate, has written several books and frequently leads retreats and teaches on the wisdom of Benedictine, Celtic, and desert ways of praying. A writer, artist, spiritual director, retreat facilitator, and teacher, she is the online abbess of www.abbeyofthearts.com, a global online monastery dedicated to the integration of contemplative practice and creative expression. In *Desert Fathers and Mothers: Early Christian*

33. Philip Bochansi, *Wisdom of the Desert Fathers and Mothers: Ancient Advice for the Modern World* (Gastonia, NC: TAN Books, 2020).

*Wisdom Sayings—Annotated and Explained* Paintner writes about the practices of these early ascetics and their influence on later Christianity.[34]

Ruth Haley Barton, who has been cited throughout this chapter, is founder of the Transforming Center, a ministry dedicated to strengthening the souls of pastors, Christian leaders, and the congregations and organizations they serve. A teacher, retreat leader, and trained spiritual director, she is the author of numerous books and articles on the spiritual life. *Invitation to Solitude and Silence* is a work that is influential in this thesis-project.

Alan Fadling, another author cited in this chapter, is president and founder of Unhurried Living, Inc., in Mission Viejo, California. He speaks and consults with leaders and their organizations internationally. In *An Unhurried Life: Following Jesus' Rhythms of Work and Rest* Fadling describes his journey from busyness into the rhythms of Jesus. How do we find balance between our sense of calling and the call to rest? *An Unhurried Life* offers a way.

## Practice of Silence and Solitude, with Emphasis on Pentecostalism

"Christian denominations have highlighted the role of silence and solitude to varying degrees," writes Jordan. He continues,

> Among the most well-known for their use of silence are the Quakers, who have embraced the discipline as a vital activity in worship. . . . Hence, worship in the Quaker church—at least in those congregations still holding to traditional Quaker practices—consists of people gathered silently in the unity of the Spirit, waiting to experience God in locutions or simply in the silence. . . . The purpose . . . is to experience the indwelling Christ.[35]

Further, Jordan explains,

> The Roman Catholic Church also places importance on the disciplines-not necessarily for all Catholics, but at least in its monastic communities. . . . The Carthusian order places

34. Christine Valters Paintner, *Desert Fathers and Mothers: Early Christian Wisdom Sayings—Annotated and Explained* (Nashville, TN: SkyLight Illuminations, 2012).

35. Jordan, "Silent Submission," 10.

> the greatest emphasis on silence and solitude, followed by the Cistercian and the Benedictine orders. Thomas Merton, noted for his prolific writings on mysticism, was a twentieth century American Trappist monk, an expression of the Cistercian form of monasticism.[36]

This thesis-project, however, focuses not on leaders from these Christian traditions but specifically on leaders who are from a Pentecostal background. These leaders are the beneficiaries of the work and devotion of their Pentecostal ancestors.

The Pentecostal tradition is one that believes that a

> relationship with God incorporates various elements which shape the character of that relationship. There are *beliefs* which condition our view of God and our approach to the work of God in our lives. There are *practices*, both corporate and private, which serve as vehicles through which relationship with God is mediated and which contribute to the experience of God itself. There are *sensibilities*, habitual attitudes, or capacities for being affected in certain ways, which predispose a given community to notice or respond to the Spirit of God in a distinct manner. And then there are *values* which govern our sense of what is important to notice, to experience, or to do.[37]

Pentecostalism sees Jesus not only has the Savior but also as the one who gives the Spirit's baptism and sanctifying work. For further emphasis, "Pentecostals expect the Holy Spirit to speak to them, to touch their hearts through strong emotions, to reveal something of God to them through ideas and pictures that come to their minds or through dreams, to pray through them in sighs too deep for words and in unknown languages, and to transform them ever more closely in holiness to the image of Christ."[38] The Pentecostals strongly believe in the healing ministry of Jesus. "The Jesus who healed those who came to him with their infirmities on earth is the same Jesus who heals those who come to him today."[39]

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36. Jordan, "Silent Submission," 10.

37. Evan B. Howard and Daniel E. Albrecht, "Pentecostal Spirituality," Spirituality Shoppe: A Center for the Study of Christian Spirituality, accessed July 27, 2021, https://spiritualityshoppe.org/pentecostal-spirituality/, 2.

38. Howard and Albrecht, "Pentecostal Spirituality," 2.

39. Howard and Albrecht, "Pentecostal Spiritualitym"2.

The practices of Pentecostals are summed up in "the way they worship, the way they perform their personal devotions, these are the ways they behave and the activities that characterize their lived relationship with God."[40]

Pentecostal spirituality is categorized by individual experience, oral tradition, spontaneity, otherworldliness, and biblical authority.

Individual experience is the way Pentecostals see life in the light of salvation. One looking in cannot judge of a Christian has had the born-again experience which is only through belief in Jesus Christ. Fellowship with the triune God is a lived experience. Pentecostals "act on the belief that God has initiated the divine-human relationship and has invited people to enter into the presence of God."[41]

In relation to spontaneity the Pentecostal has the belief that one should expect a move of the Holy Spirit at any time. One common expression in the Pentecostal churches is, come with an expectation, shout a leader, allow the Spirit of God to work in our midst! One writer states, "Their worship service is an interesting mixture of spontaneity; the exercise of spiritual gifts such as speaking in tongues, prophesying, and prayer for healing; and attentiveness to the mystical encounter with God."[42]

"The Pentecostal tradition regards the Bible, contextually understood, as its basic source and inspiration, rule of faith and practice. It supplies the corrective and interpretive authority for

40. Howard and Albrecht, "Pentecostal Spirituality," 3.

41. Wonsuk Ma and Robert P Menzies, eds., *The Spirit and Spirituality: Essays in Honor of Russell P. Spittler* (New York, NY: T&T Clark International, 2004), 74.

42. Veli-Matti Karkkainen, *Pneumatology: The Holy Spirit in Ecumenical, International, and Contextual Perspective* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic 2002), 91.

all Christian experience."[43] Pentecostals believe that the Bible is the Word of God and that though God's words there comes transformation.

Pentecostals view fellowship with God and with others as very important. We believe that all members have a say in the services. One important event in this regard is seen in testimony services.

These values have greatly influenced the practice of prayer in Pentecostal worship. For Pentecostals the service is never quiet; they do not embrace a moment of silence in the services, which is not so in other denominations. If there is no emotionalism or running up and down in the audience, the services are considered to be dead. Prayer is loud, with everyone praying at the same time. There is no time given to hear what God is saying in the midst of the congregation:

> Silence is eschewed even in times of prayer. Prayers are characteristically initiated abruptly, with no pause to collect thoughts, or to quiet or still the spirits of the worshipers in the presence of God. Very common among Pentecostal gatherings is the practice of collective oral prayer, "concert prayer," or unison prayer. However, this is not common prayer, as practiced in liturgical churches with the use of prayer books. On the contrary, this is prayer that is often directed and initiated by a pastor or lay leader, who is then joined in prayer by those assembled. The people pray vocally, simultaneously, each spontaneously and extemporaneously composing his or her own prayer.[44]

"A practice, perhaps more common among earlier Pentecostals, alternately called 'tarrying,' or 'waiting on the Lord' allows for periods of silence in prayer."[45] In the Pentecostal mind, "tarrying" and "waiting on the Lord" are closely associated with prayer. "Tarrying" at the

43. Jason Kelvin Phiri, *African Pentecostal Spirituality: A Study of the Emerging African Pentecostal Churches in Zambia* (University of Pretoria: research output, 2010), 43, accessed July 30, 2021, http://hdl.handle.net/2263/28976.

44. Philip Adair Pruitt, "The Gift of Silence: A Renewed Call to Contemporary Pentecostals" (School of Theology of the University of the South, 2013), 13.

45. Pruitt, "Gift of Silence," 15.

altar "became a Pentecostal counterpart to the Baptist mourner's bench, both of which defined their experience of the Christian faith."[46]

"While Pentecostals practice prayerful silence as they tarry or wait on the Lord, they would disagree with the Quakers, who believe that true worship means quietly waiting on the Spirit of God and applying oneself in silence directly to Jesus Christ to receive his grace and know his will."[47] It is important to note that this prayerful silence is not necessarily considered or appreciated as a method of prayer in and of itself, nor is it a way to seek spiritual union with God. It is rather pragmatic in nature. It is a prayerful anticipation of some other experience or event—an expectation that "something is about to happen." It is a means to an end; and that end might be "conversion, sanctification, and Spirit baptism by the sovereignty of God."[48]

## COGOP International Office

The website of the Church of God of Prophecy outlines some of the history and traditions of the denomination:

> The General Assembly of 1907 officially adopted the name Church of God. During the years that followed he disruption within the Church in 1923, much controversy ensued over which group had the legal right to that name. Several protracted, legal proceedings failed to resolve the issue satisfactorily. For several years, we used the name, "Church of God, over which A. J. Tomlinson is General Overseer," but that did not fully settle the matter. Finally, in 1952 there was an official name change to Church of God of Prophecy.[49]

Further, "The International Offices in Cleveland Tennessee is a vibrant worldwide body of believers, united in worship, working hand in hand to share God's love and a message of hope

46. Vinson Synan, *The Century of the Holy Spirit: 100 Years of Pentecostal and Charismatic Renewal* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2001), 280.

47. Pruitt, "Gift of Silence," 16.

48. Pruitt, "Gift of Silence," 16.

49. "About Us," Church of God of Prophecy, accessed September 27, 2021, https://cogop/aboutcogop/.

to the broken hearted. The Church of God of Prophecy has over one-and-a half million members, with worshiping in over 10,000 churches or missions in 135 nations of the world."[50] COGOP International core values are prayer, harvest, leadership development, biblical stewardship, and service. In addition, "the Church of God of Prophecy believes the Bible to be God's Holy word and embraces biblical doctrine as taught in the New Testament."[51] There are twenty-eight New Testament teachings that the church embraces.

## Church of God of Prophecy Grand Cayman

Christianity came to the Cayman Islands in 1846, and over the years Christian denominations have increased significantly. The Church of God of Prophecy Cayman Limited is also known as Victory Tabernacle. It is connected to the International COCOP and embraces the same doctrines, mission, vision, and core values. Before 1967, people visited the Cayman Islands from various neighboring Caribbean regions in search of economic stability for themselves and their families, but also they brought their religions and new types of spiritualities. At that time there were no Pentecostal churches in the Cayman Islands. Therefore, new settlers to the Islands who were accustomed to the Pentecostal movement began to contact leaders of their respective denominations in their jurisdiction of birth with the aim of establishing new missions in the Cayman Islands.

In 1967 the first Pentecostal movement had its inception; not many Caymanian natives were readily attracted to the vibrant way of worship. The COCOP members who were working in the Cayman Islands in 1978 contacted the Caribbean Mission Representative, Bishop Alvin

50. "About Us."

51. Ghandi Thompson, "Christian Formation: Discipleship of Youth and Millennials in the Church of God of Prophecy in the Bahamas" (DMin thesis-project, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, 2019), 9.

Moss, who resided in the Bahamas. He sent a mission team of approximately ten individuals to the Cayman Islands; they engaged in holding prayer meetings, house-to-house witnessing, and a three-week revival. In the same year property was purchased and a branch of the COGOP was established with a small but growing membership.

In 1983, Bishop Lesmond Graham, the succeeding Caribbean Mission Representative of COGOP, felt the local church would be better served by being affiliated with Jamaica due to its proximity, as opposed to the Bahamas. This local church was referred to as a parish in connection with the Jamaica region. In 1987, Bishop Clayton Martin was appointed as pastor for the local COGOP. At the time, twenty-six members were noted on record. Since then, in the three decades of the history of the local COGOP, there have been several changes in leadership and leadership styles. Bishop Martin remains the overseer and presbyter of this local church. The church has approximately 250 active members, along with attendees from other denominations. As was the practice of COGOP's founding fathers in 1886, the local church meets regularly for prayer and study of the Word of God. Attendance has been very small.

How people are discipled or not discipled varies from one local church to another, as does their spiritual formation. Consequently there is an assorted group in the Cayman church. Alongside them are those who came to faith in Jesus in that local church. It takes time for some to be assimilated into the existing culture. The balancing act is challenging because Cayman is a working society and people are inconsistent in attendance at church training sessions. Also, there is the "rolled over" policy whereby employees have a work permit for nine years but then must leave the country for twelve months.

In the activities carried out by the different ministries, Christians are encouraged to practice spiritual disciplines, as was the practice of COGOP's founding fathers in 1903. Some of

what is done in the local church in the Cayman Islands is influenced by the directives given from the international offices of the church. Various auxiliaries are in place catering to the needs of women, men, youth, and children. There is a pattern of meeting regularly for prayer and study of the Word of God. There is no regular corporate call for the practice of silence and solitude.

The Church of God of Prophecy in the Cayman Islands embraces individual experience—each person experiences the new birth, accepting Jesus Christ as his or her personal Savior. In this conversion process individuals will go through new convert classes in which they are thought the basic principles of the Christian faith along with emphasis on the Twenty-nine Teachings that are made prominent. This is a tradition of the Church of God of Prophecy. One shortfall, however, is that follow-up of these new converts is not consistent. Recently the church started a discipleship program which is done by means of weekly Bible study. Regular adult Sunday school and bi-weekly Bible studies are conducted to teach the Word of God. Spontaneity within worship can rise to a point where no one is able to discern correctly whether what is happening is a move of the Holy Spirit. Due to this shortfall, leaders are blamed for worship services that are too programmed. Praying is taken to another level as prayers are generally long and repetitive. Silence is not practiced during times of corporate prayer.

Christian leaders in the church can get very busy and not be able to refresh themselves by spending time with God. And this has had a dampening effect on the body of Christ. From personal experience my walk with the Lord has been at different levels due to the lack of time that is available for me to spend time in the presence of God. However, when the practice of solitude and silence was first introduced, the discipline was embraced. The ability to slow down and not always be in a hurry was practicable. Over the year of my study there has been a difference in functioning in the capacity of serving in the church ministry.

## Project Design: Understanding the Challenges

Since there seems to be a lack of available research focusing on the challenges faced by Christian leaders, this thesis-project must start by verifying and seeking to understand that need. In this section I will present two surveys and explore how and why they were put together. These surveys are meant to test the validity of the hypothesis—that Christian leaders do have challenges in practicing the discipline of solitude and silence—but also to begin to understand the specific challenges leaders face and to assemble resources available to help them.

The first survey will explore the relationship of work and how it affects spiritual formation due to the challenge of finding time to rest. This will be done with a small group of eleven members from my local congregation. The second survey will explore the challenges that members experience in achieving the discipline of solitude and silence. From these findings a time of solitude and silence will be spent with these members. The challenges will be explored as we meet and study *Invitation to Solitude and Silence: Experiencing God's Transforming Presence* by Ruth Haley Barton. A copy of this book will be presented to all the individuals; they will read a chapter and come prepared to discuss in the sessions. There is a section in the book for practice; the participants will be asked to do the practice at home and to write in their journal as they reflect. The participants will be told the reason for the retreat. I will explain that a journal will be given to each of them and that the information placed in the journal will be used as findings for my research. These findings will then be analyzed.

Having established the challenges that members of the Church of God of Prophecy experience due to the busyness of their life and the inability to experience silence and solitude, I will move on to address the scriptural call from God for members to be spiritually transformed.

In chapter 2, the biblical and theological perspective concerning the problem and the hypothesis will be considered.

Having surveyed the small group in relation to their limitations about silence and solitude and the challenges they face in such a world, I will focus on literature about solitude and silence, which will include monastic and contemporary sources, including the Pentecostal spirituality perspective.

The final chapter of this thesis-project will provide some brief feedback on the surveys and journals, as well as final reflection on the project, its impact on these challenges, and how the results will be beneficial to the church.

# CHAPTER TWO

# BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

## Introduction

This chapter seeks to provide a biblical and theological foundation for understanding how the discipline of silence and solitude is formative for the Christian life, helping believers overcome the world's noise and confusion caused by sin. The world requires people to work without slowing down; the world is full of noise, and the more people have, the more they want. Sin has paved such a world, and the only way to conquer such a world is to live with a mind focused on God. "To live a Christian life means to live in the world without being of it," Henri Nouwen observed. "It is in solitude that this inner freedom can grow."[1]

## God Speaks

God speaks in many different ways throughout the Bible. He speaks to creation, he speaks to the prophets, he speaks to his disciples, he speaks to men and women, and he is still speaking. The God who speaks does so in different ways. Whether it is audible, inspired words, a still small voice, through the Scriptures, or through others, God speaks. God is a communicator who has dialogue with his people. The greatest pleasure man could ever have is communication with God.

In creation God spoke, and things were created. He spoke to Adam and Eve in the midst of the garden (Gen 1–2; 1:26-28). God spoke to the forefathers. He told Abraham to leave his country and go to the promised land (Gen 12:1). He spoke to Abraham that he would have a son

1. Henri J. M. Nouwen, *Out of Solitude: Three Meditations on the Christian Life* (Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria Press, 2004), 25.

in his old age (Gen 17:15-17). He spoke when Abraham interceded for those in Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen 18:32). God spoke to Moses and sent him as the deliverer of his people (Exod 38). God gave the commandments to Moses and wrote them on a tablet (Exod 20:3-17). God spoke to Moses when the children of Israel were pursued by Pharaoh and his army at the Red Sea. God spoke to pagan kings: he spoke to Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, through a dream (Dan 2:28-30). God spoke to Pharaoh as to the state of the Egyptian economy (Gen 20:3-7). God spoke to Elijah in a still small voice (1 Kgs 19:11-13).

God spoke through prophets to deliver messages to his people. He spoke to them concerning the destruction of Jerusalem, the restoration of pure worship, the coming of the Messiah, and the reign of the Messiah (2 Kgs 21:10-15; Isa 3:1-8; Jer 2:1-3; 13; 46:27; Amos 9:13-15; Mic 5:2; Isa 42:1-3; 53:1-22; 9:6-7; 33:24; Dan 12:13).

God spoke through his Son Jesus Christ, the living word (John 1:1). Jesus spoke directly with his disciples throughout his ministry on earth. Just before it was time for him to leave this earth, he gave them instruction concerning forgiveness, his betrayal, his departure, heaven, the coming of the Holy Spirit, peace, remaining fruitful, the world, and his return (John 13:1–16:33). These disciples, even though they were bothered and amazed, were also encouraged by the spoken word of God.

God spoke to Saul on his way to Damascus and with Ananias concerning Paul's conversion (Acts 9). He also spoke to the apostles, giving divine revelation to Peter (Acts 2:10-11).

In this present world, God speaks to his children through his Word and the Holy Spirit. The Scriptures are given to us as a guide in the Christians life (2 Tim 3:16). "For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through the endurance taught in the

Scriptures and the encouragement they provide we might have hope" (Rom 15:4). It is for Christian leaders to find time to spend in God's presence as he seeks fellowship with us and to listen as he speaks through whatsoever means he chooses.

## Listening and Response

In solitude and silence our response is to listen. This involves awareness and noticing. "Listening can heal the rift between those proverbial enemies hearing and doing."[2] Paul in Romans 2:13 makes it clear that not the hearers but the doers of the law are considered righteous. Obedience comes out of listening to what God is saying. James warns those hearers who deceive themselves into thinking they do not need to be doers. Jesus concludes his Sermon on the Mount by comparing people who hear his words but do not act on them with a house built on sand. Many within our congregations will say, "Why can't I hear God's voice?" Many a time this is due to one's inability to listen due to distractions. Psalm 95:7-8 cautions, "Today, if only you would hear his voice, 'Do not harden your hearts.'" This could be caused by the inability to slow down and rest; a tired body cannot listen to God. It is out of a life of fellowship and intimacy that we are able to listen. Listening comes from desire, where we choose to shut out distractions. McHugh quotes the teaching of Jesus: "No one can serve two masters; for a slave will either hate the one and love the other or be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth" (Matt 6:24).[3] A person who is overwhelmed with work, seeking to earn more to care for the family, is unlikely to find time for rest and listening to God. There must be a balance, and God must be in first place. We must be like Samuel as we go through our day and say, "Speak,

2. Adam S. McHugh, *The Listening Life: Embracing Attentiveness in a World of Distraction* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2015), 15.

3. McHugh, *The Listening Life*, 5.

LORD, for your servant is listening" (1 Sam 3:9). Let this be our prayer. God speaks, and he wants us to be still and listen.

## Spiritual Formation: Becoming Like Christ

From the definitions given in chapter 1 it must be recognized that spiritual formation is the work of the triune God by which one is transformed into the image of Jesus Christ. The Scripture makes it clear that transformation is the work of the triune God, and sanctification is the term used to explain how Christians become like Christ. Paul in 2 Corinthians 5:17 states, "Therefore if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come. The old has gone, the new is here!" Paul was transformed from being a persecutor of the church to a preacher of the gospel. Further, Paul stated in Romans 12:2, "Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will." This transformation "denotes a deep internal change in our character that produces outward change in our behavior."[4] But the result is God transforming us into his image. One must recognize it is not a onetime event but unceasing. There is a part that we as leaders must play. Each day as we practice the spiritual disciplines there will be change.

Robert Lancaster Jordan amplifies this point when he writes,

> Christian leaders must depend on God for their process of becoming (transforming), and his involvement makes possible the seemingly impossible. The discipline of solitude and silence provide a mechanism for Christians to align their lives with two understandings. Solitude removes the exterior distractions and silence quiets the interior noise so that the Christian becomes less dependent on the voices of others and the thoughts of his or her own mind.[5]

4. Jerry Bridges, *The Discipline of Grace: God's Role and Our Role in the Pursuit of Holiness* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2006), 171.

5. Robert Lancaster Jordan, "Silent Submission: A Reformed Path Toward Integrative Leadership" (DMin thesis-project, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, 2002), 46. The thesis-project can be found at Theological Research Exchange Network: e-docs (oclc.org).

Entertaining and practicing God's presence in solitude and silence helps leaders to be tuned to what God is saying as our minds are being transformed to hear his still small voice.

## Work Affects Solitude and Silence

Work became a hindrance to our worship to God after the fall of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. As stated in Genesis, God told man that from the sweat of his brow he would labor. However, working without resting affects solitude and silence and hence not being able to listen. God wants us to enter his rest: "Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will perish by following their example of disobedience" (Heb. 4:11). The rest of God is a gift that one needs to receive, and so one is enabled to be in the presence of God through solitude and silence. "We cannot understand either the character or the significance of Sabbath apart from work and workplace. Work doesn't take us away from God: it continues the work of God through us. Sabbath and work are not in opposition: Sabbath and work are integrated parts of an organic whole. Either apart from the other is crippled."[6]

The theology of work and the theology of rest, when taken in the right perspective, go hand in hand. Genesis 1–2 shows that God saw creation as good, and at the end of the work week he rested.

### The Creation

Throughout Genesis 1–2 readers see how the world was created by God within six days, and he rested on the seventh day. On the first day God separated the light from the darkness; on the second day God separated the water above and beyond the expanse; on the third day God

6. Eugene H. Peterson, *Christ Plays in Ten Thousand Places: A Conversation in Spiritual Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005), 115.

created vegetation and the inhabitants of the sea; on the fourth day God made the great lights; on the fifth day God created creatures and living things on the earth and the sea, and the birds and the animals; on the sixth day God created man in his own image; and on the seventh day God rested after his work was completed.

In his comments about creation, Eugene Peterson says, "The most prominent feature of Genesis 1 is its rhythmic structure. The creation account is arranged in a sequence of seven days."[7] It is important to recognize the use of the phrase "and God said" at the beginning and ending of each day, and the phrase "and there was evening and there was morning"; at the end of each day the number of the day was stated.

However, on the seventh day the order changed. "Instead of the number being in the concluding phrase, it is in the introductory: 'And on the seventh day.' This number seven is then repeated twice more in successive sentences. So, seventh is repeated three times, giving the seventh day an emphasis far beyond that of the first six."[8] Peterson further emphasizes that "we enter the rhythms of creation time and find that we are internalizing a creation sense of orderliness and connectedness and resonance that is very much like what we get from music."[9] God does everything in order such that as we grow in Christ's image our life takes on order. Our growth and spiritual formation is a process that can be achieved only though the power of the Holy Spirit.

There should be no misunderstanding that work is not good; however, one must recognize that work and rest are like a pea in a pod. "As God works through the days of the week and detail after detail comes into being, a refrain develops: God saw that it was good. Seven

7. Peterson, *Christ Plays in Ten Thousand Places*, 67.

8. Peterson, *Christ Plays in Ten Thousand Places*, 67.

9. Peterson, *Christ Plays in Ten Thousand Places*, 67.

times across the six days we hear it, and God saw it was good. The final statement, the seventh, is superlative, and indeed it was very good (Genesis 1:31). Good work. Good workplace."[10]

## The Fall

God created a perfect world and saw that his work was good, and this is of no surprise to him, as this is his nature. It should be noted that God dwells in the presence of his people (Gen 3:8-10). He walked in the garden to fellowship with Adam and Eve. But because of their disobedience they were separated from the presence of God. Moreover, due to the fall, work became a burden to man. An account is given in Genesis 3:17-19 (KJV):

> And unto Adam he said, Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it: cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life; Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field; In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.

"The curse had its effect on work as follows: 1) Work had been a joy, but now it would be 'toil.' People would feel burdened by it and even come to hate it. 2) 'Thorns and thistles' would hamper people's effort to exercise dominion. In other words, the earth would not be as cooperative as it had been. 3) People would have to sweat to accomplish their tasks. Work would require enormous effort and energy."[11] People from that generation to this present generation have been burdened with work and have to be going like a propeller that is out of control.

10. Peterson, *Christ Plays in Ten Thousand Places*, 115-16.

11. Earl D. Radmacher, Ronald B. Allen, and H. Wayne House, eds., *Nelson's New Illustrated Bible Commentary: Spreading the Light of God's Word into Your Life* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1999), 13.

## Slavery

The fall has created many injustices for God's people who have been overworked, even enslaved. Exodus 1:8-14 tells of the new king who did not know about Joseph. Due to the increase of the people of God and the increase in their blessings, as God had promised to their forefathers, Pharaoh became concerned with their increase. He believed that one day the children of Israel would join with other forces and oppose the Egyptians in a time of war. As a result he decided to increase their labor, and thus the children of Israel came under Egyptian bondage. However, despite their slavery, God prospered them. Unfortunately, the cycle continued: as they prospered, the work increased.

We see a similar experience among the people of God who left their native country to live and work in the Cayman Islands. The people in these islands have been given tasks that are unbearable at times. Like the Israelites, Christians leave their native country to be able to eat and provide for their family and children. The work gets so hard at times that the people neglect their first love, Jesus Christ. With this in mind we must recognize that within every situation in which we find ourselves we must be determined to cry out to God.

## The Exodus

God heard the cry of his people, "and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob. And God looked upon the children of Israel, and God had respect unto them" (Exod 2:24-25, KJV).

God sent Moses to deliver his people from slavery. It was impossible for the children of God to escape on their own from their taskmasters, but Peterson makes it clear that salvation "is

initiated in conditions of human impossibility, all odds stacked against it."[12] Deliverance or salvation belongs to God, who hears when we cry out to him, and he will deliver us in his timing. Peterson further states, "Salvation is not imposed from above or from without; it emerges out of the conditions in which we find ourselves as life is confronted with death."[13] A life of hard work in bondage had kept these people away from God. So it is in our life of spiritual formation. When we get burdened down by work, Christ is there to offer us salvation. "Just as God led the people of Israel out of captivity in Egypt into the promised land, so the Christian life can be seen as a slow process of deliverance from bondage to sin before led triumphantly into the heavenly city."[14]

## Exile

After the children of Israel had been established in the promised land, they started well but later moved from the rule of the judges to a monarchy. At this point the people violated the laws of God and broke the Sabbath. Lamentation 1:3 states, "After affliction and harsh labor, Judah has gone into exile. She dwells among the nations; she finds no resting place. All who pursue her have overtaken her in the midst of her distress." There was an absence of God for the children of God; however, whenever they remembered the God of their fathers and repented, he promised them restoration. God's people were encouraged by the prophet Jeremiah to seek the peace of the city because if they sought peace then they would receive peace. This includes the building of the city, and work continued even through this time. They had to work to show the good of a larger society (Jer 29:5-7).

12. Peterson, *Christ Plays in Ten Thousand Places*, 149.

13. Peterson, *Christ Plays in Ten Thousand Places*, 150.

14. McGrath, *Christian Spirituality*, 91.

## Jesus and the Theology of Work

John 5:17 (KJV) states, "But Jesus answered them, My Father worketh hitherto, and I work." Here we see that even though God formed the creation and then rested, he is still working. Jesus' emphasis to his accusers was that the triune God never stops working, thus confirming that work is good. Peterson states, "Jesus embraces the creation as his workplace; he anticipates his crucifixion as the finishing touch to his work week."[15] He further states that "God in Genesis and Jesus in the John are not abstractions—'higher power' or 'eternal love' or 'pure being'—but named workers working in a workplace that all of us continue to work in."[16] Work never stops, but out of work should come praise and worship to God. Jesus at work did the will of the Father.

Therefore, work continues as God calls us each day. Mark 1:16-17 (KJV) records, "Now as he walked by the sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and Andrew his brother casting a net into the sea: for they were fishers. And Jesus said unto them, come ye after me, and I will make you to become fishers of men." In following Jesus, Christians are not only to get involved in their secular workplace but also to continue to work in the kingdom as they draw closer to God. As one embraces a secular job, accepting it for what it is worth, this appreciation will draw a person closer to God where one would find rest. This is further emphasised in Acts 13:2 (KJV): "As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them." Our accomplishment cannot be if there is no connection with God.

The theology of work is further highlighted in 1 Timothy 5:8, which says, "A believer is to provide for his own relatives and his household. Failure to provide for one's family is equal to

15. Peterson, *Christ Plays in Ten Thousand Places*, 115.

16. Peterson, *Christ Plays in Ten Thousand Places*, 115.

the denial of the faith,"[17] Paul, in Titus 3:14, tells believers to continue to work and remain fruitful. "Paul gives the Cretans a practical way that they can start demonstrating their faith in good works: they can begin meeting the needs of other people."[18]

Work and more work can become idolatry, according to Peterson:

> There is more to work than work—there is God: God in completion. God in repose. God blessing. God making holy. Most of us spend most of our time in the workplace. But without Sabbath, in which God goes beyond the workplace (but not away from it), the workplace is soon emptied of any sense of the presence of God and work becomes an end in itself. It is this end in itself that makes an un-sabbathed workplace a breeding ground for idols. We make idols in our workplaces when we reduce all relationships to functions that we can manage. We make idols in our workplaces when we reduce work to the dimensions of our egos and control.[19]

A life consumed by work and less consumed by God's presence leads to self-sufficiency. This will hinder spiritual transformation, as in this process we have to give the triune God the whole self. With no rest, our effort changes the entire framework in which we describe our lives. We lose perception and attentiveness about God and detections of resurrection. We lose the capacity to sing "This Is My Father's World" and instead end up singing egocentric songs about what we are doing and feeling.[20]

## Solitude and Silence as Rest

Rest has become a taboo in the society we live in. "People in a hurry never have time for recovery. Their minds have little time to meditate and pray so that problems can be put in

17. Radmacher, Allen, and House, *Nelson's New Illustrated Bible Commentary*, 1604.

18. Radmacher, Allen, and House, *Nelson's New Illustrated Bible Commentary*, 1627.

19. Peterson, *Christ Plays in Ten Thousand Places*, 116.

20. Peterson, *Christ Plays in Ten Thousand Places*, 117.

perspective. In short, people in our age are showing signs of physiological disintegration because we are living at a pace that is too fast for our bodies."[21]

In a blog about rest and relaxation, the writers note that

> "Rest" is defined as "peace, ease or refreshment." It is a repeated theme throughout Scripture, beginning with the creation week (Genesis 2:2-3). God created for six days; then He rested, not because He was tired but to set the standard for mankind to follow. The Ten Commandments made resting on the Sabbath a requirement of the Law (Exodus 20:8-11). Notice that God said, "Remember the Sabbath." It wasn't something new; it had been around since creation. All God's people and their servants and the animals were to have one day in seven to rest. The command to rest was not an excuse to be lazy. You had to work for six days to get to the Sabbath. The land also needed to rest (Leviticus 25:4, 8-12). God is very serious about rest.[22]

Concurring with this explanation, Calhoun writes that "entering into rest depends on honouring our God-given limits. By paying attention to the physical, mental and spiritual needs of the body, we learn when and how to rest."[23]

It is expressly stated in Exodus 20:8-11 that a day of rest was to be remembered by the children of Israel as that which God had done when he had completed creation. In their commentary, Radmacher, Allen, and House say,

> The fourth commandment, remember the sabbath day, was the special sign of the covenant with Israel at Mount Sinai. With this command, God set Israel apart from its neighbors. The word Sabbath means "Rest." The day was kept holy by ceasing all labor on that day. The Sabbath was specifically the seventh day, Saturday. During the Sabbath, the Israelites worshiped God and recalled His deliverance of them from slavery.[24]

Deuteronomy 5:12-15 also states that God's people were to observe a day of rest. Due to the Israelites' inability to rest during slavery, they were commanded to observe the Sabbath as a

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21. Adele Ahlberg Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices That Transform Us* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 63, cited in Archibald Hart, *The Hidden Link between Adrenalin and Stress* (Dallas, TX: Word, 1991).

22. "What Does the Bible Say about Rest and Relaxation?", Got Questions, accessed October 5, 2021, https://www.gotquestions.org/rest-relaxation.html.

23. Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook*, 63.

24. Radmacher, Allen, and House, *Nelson's New Illustrated Bible Commentary*, 122-23.

way of worshiping God for the exodus. In doing so one could never be considered a slave, for God had broken the yoke of bondage from his people. So the main aim is to maintain what God has done and observe a time of rest. "The commandment to keep the Sabbath holy did not mean that the other days of the week and their activities were unholy. The Sabbath was to remind Israel that human beings were dependent on God, and that they have strong tendencies to exalt themselves and their accomplishments, to turn themselves into gods even—to borrow an O[ld] T[estament] expression."[25] The Sabbath was a time for rest from work and being able to rest in God.

Before salvation, we were treated as slaves, Mark Buchanan clearly states: "The point was you worked. Period. Rest was for other people. Rest was for Pharaoh. But Pharaoh couldn't rest if you didn't work."[26] Pharaoh had to accomplish what he desired through slaves, so he ordered taskmasters and pressured the workers with more work and no rest. "That's what life was like before," Buchanan reminds his readers.[27] Thanks be to God who has delivered us from slavery—we are free, and where the Spirit of the Lord is there is liberty. Work is good, but when we work, we need to rest to absorb what God has in store for us so that we can accomplish his work both physically and spiritually. Buchanan further states, "To refuse Sabbath is in effect to spurn the gift of freedom. It is to resume willingly what we once cried out for God to deliver us from. It is choosing what once we shunned. Rest, it turns out, is a condition of liberty. God calls

25. Radmacher, Allen, and House, *Nelson's New Illustrated Bible Commentary*, 242.

26. Mark Buchanan, *The Rest of God: Restoring Your Soul by Restoring Sabbath* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2006), 89.

27. Buchanan, *The Rest of God*, 89.

us to live in the freedom that he won for us with his own outstretched arm. Sabbath is a refusal to go back to Egypt."[28]

From the Theology of Work Project comes this insight: "The deeper problem with rest is not a matter of scheduling. It is a matter of trust in God. Somehow, people's hearts have to be changed."[29] In Matthew 11:28-30 we see the restoration of rest through Jesus Christ, who says, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light." From the Israelites' perspective it might be argued that only God can give rest: "The Lord replied, 'My Presence will go with you, and I will give you rest'" (Exod 33:14). However, in spiritual formation, as we embrace that the process involves the triune God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—Jesus, who is God, provides rest just as was promised to the Israelites. Matthew 12:6-8 states, "I tell you that something greater than the temple is here. If you had known what these words mean, 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice,' you would not have condemned the innocent. For the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath."

The Theology of Work Project expands on this concept:

> Jesus refers to himself as the lord of the sabbath because he does something that the sabbath law could never do. God wants to commune with his people through rest, but people can't commune with God if they fear his condemnation. Jesus frees people from condemnation by forgiving all sin through his sacrifice on the cross. In doing so Jesus grants Christians renewed access to God that individuals could never earn or accomplish on their own. No longer estranged from God due to sin, people can now enter into real restful communion with God.[30]

28. Buchanan, *The Rest of God*, 89.

29. Theology of Work Project, "Balancing Rhythms of Rest and Work: Overview," accessed October 5, 2021, https://www.theologyofwork.org/key-topics/rest-and-work-overview.

30.Theology of Work Project, "Balancing Rhythms of Rest and Work: Overview."

The rest that is described in Hebrews 4:1-11 is to be seen as having an already-not yet focus. God's offering of rest through his Son Jesus Christ, which is rest from sins and bondage, has occurred through his incarnation, death, burial, and resurrection. According to Hebrews 4:2-3 (KJV), "For unto us was the gospel preached, as well as unto them: but the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it. For we which have believed do enter into rest, as he said, As I have sworn in my wrath, if they shall enter into my rest: although the works were finished from the foundation of the world."

Rest in God can be accomplished only by having faith in him. "The person who believes enters God's rest, but the person who does not believe does not enter."[31] Further emphasis of this rest offered to Christians is seen in Hebrews 4:4-10. We must acknowledge that God's rest is a reality. The rest of God for his people is certain. As we are to transform in his image, we acknowledge that he rested after his creation work, his promises are certain, and he promises David a new day. As we enter God's rest, we do not have to struggle over our situations, but we obtain the power to overcome them.

Buchanan states,

> The people under Moses didn't just fail to keep Sabbath, they fail to trust God, to rest in him, to believe in the Lord of the Sabbath. They refused to believe that God would protect them and provide for them. During the time of Joshua, the next generation of Israel entered the land and entered God's rest. This rest was partial, it was preliminary to a greater rest, another sabbath day God is preparing: There remained therefore a rest to the people of God, Hebrews 4:9. This day is a reality to which all previous Sabbath days stand as shadows. Let us labor therefore to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief, Hebrews 4:11.[32]

Therefore, all we must do is listen to the voice of the Lord and enter his rest. Bear in mind, God is always speaking. "There is no speech or language where his voice is not heard" (Ps

31. Leadership Ministries Worldwide, *The Preacher's Outline and Sermon Bible, Hebrews-James*, New Testament KJV (Chattanooga, TN: Alpha-Omega Ministries, 1996), 43.

32. Buchanan, *The Rest of God*, 187.

19:3). But we are not always listening. “We don’t make the effort and so fail to go boldly into the throne room to receive what we need: a word that can pierce and cut and heal. If we don’t listen, we never enter his rest. Yet if we don’t enter his rest, we never listen.”[33]

## Rest for the Whole Person

There are times when, as Christian leaders, we become tired and burned out. We think we are achieving but nothing is happening. We have to listen to the voice of Jesus to guide us as we reach this stage. Matthew 11:28 states, “Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, I will give you rest.” The human is body, soul, and spirit—and there are biblical texts that refer to the type of rest that each part requires. Psalm 131:2 states, “Surely I have behaved and quieted myself, as a child that is weaned of his mother: my soul is even as a weaned child.” In silence and solitude this type of rest can restore our body. This is the place where we are able to give it all to God. The state of feeling like a little child comes into play. The body needs rest, and this rest is experienced in solitude and silence.

Resting the mind is exemplified in Psalm 131:1 (KJV), which says, “LORD, my heart is not haughty, nor mine eyes lofty: neither do I exercise myself in great matters, or in things too high for me.” Here we take the mind off the things we are trying to fix and leave everything in the hands of God. Distractions will come in solitude and silence, but we must allow our minds to be at rest. Our thoughts and emotions must come under control when the mind finds rest in God.

Psalm 62:5 urges, “Rest in God alone, O my soul, for my hope comes from him.” In solitude and silence our souls find rest in God, so that whatever comes up one allows God to speak. It might be an emotional thought; everything in a person would be exposed. “The point of

33. Buchanan, *The Rest of God*, 188.

solitude is to be with God with what is true about me right now—whatever that is," writes Ruth Haley Barton. "Silence, then, allows me to simply give God access to the reality of myself."[34]

## The Results of Insufficient or Sufficient Rest in God

Furthermore, "there are few things that help so much for conversing with Christ as silence. The silence I speak of is, obviously, the inner silence of the heart without which the voice of Christ will simply not be heard. This inner silence is very hard to achieve for most of us. . . . Your tolerance of silence is a fairly good indicator of your spiritual (and even intellectual and emotional) depth."[35] The Scripture made this clear: "Be still and know that I am God" (Ps 46:10). "Only those who wait on the Lord renew their strength. Only those who are quiet and watchful find God's mercy that is new every morning. Only those who join him in his love for the contrite and broken in spirit recognize him hidden among 'the least of these' (Matt. 25:40)."[36] Silence is important during our spiritual transformation, as it enables us to hear what the Lord is saying in that time.

"Truly my soul waiteth upon God: from him cometh my salvation. He only is my rock and my salvation; he is my defence; I shall not be greatly moved," writes the psalmist (Ps 62:1-2, KJV). Commenting on this passage, Buchanan says,

> The context of the psalm is distress: David is beset by enemies bent on his ruin. The only way to truly rest in a world like that—a world of deceit and enmity—is to find rest in God alone. David had no way to dredge up rest from his circumstances. It had to be sought elsewhere. It had to come from God. David had to know God as his rock, his

34. Ruth Haley Barton, *Invitation to Solitude and Silence: Experiencing God's Transforming Presence* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2010), 79.

35. Stephen Macchia, "Touch Point: Silence and Solitude," cited in Anthony De Mello, *Contact with God: Retreat Conferences* (Chicago, IL: Loyola University Press, 1991), 39-40.

36. Buchanan, *The Rest of God*, 49.

> salvation, his unshakable fortress: that God alone is sovereign and works all things together for good for those who love him and are called to his purposes.[37]

Revelation 3:16 (KJV) states, "So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth." Insufficient rest in God can cause us to become lukewarm. This is something that God hates. To be spiritually transformed, we must give our whole person. The focus should be on the Lord Almighty, on becoming new, on forgetting the old habits and seeking the things that are beneficial to life (i.e., spiritual things; Phil 3:13). We must not depend on our past but instead rest in God to take us through the present and the future.

Romans 12:11 (KJV) states, "Not slothful in business; fervent in spirit; serving the Lord." Insufficient rest in God will cause us to be lazy, not accomplishing the things that God has called us to do. What causes us to be so weak spiritually is our lack of spending time with the true and living God. To be energized, we must be transformed in the image of Christ and seek God in prayer, fasting, and reading of the Word. This continuous practice of being in the presence of the Holy Spirit will cause us to be enthusiastic about what we are doing in the kingdom of God.
In our churches the concept of rest has become one that is too legalistic, for rest is interpreted as keeping a day rather than having a Sabbath heart.

## Biblical Characters Who Experienced Solitude and Silence

### Moses

In Exodus 3, Moses was called by God in the wilderness where he was attending to his father-in-law's sheep. "After 40 years of training in the courts of Pharaoh, Moses now neared the

37. Buchanan, *The Rest of God*, 65.

end of another forty years of his life as a shepherd."[38] Moses was in a place where he was all alone with the sheep. He saw what looked like a flame of fire in the bush, but the bush was not consumed. Moses must have been amazed and would have started to wonder. However, Moses recognized that something was happening, and he was attentive.

The burning bush drew Moses' attention, and he drew closer. However, upon reaching the place he heard the voice of God. In times of solitude and silence our ability to notice and draw closer to God will be clearer. Moses was commanded by God not to come any further because "the ground had become holy; it was set apart be the divine presence."[39] Solitude and silence is a time where we set ourselves apart to be in the presence of God and to hear from him. "The dramatic encounter of Moses with the living God is an unforgettable moment in biblical history. God identified himself as the God of your fathers—the God worshiped by Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. In announcing these names, the Lord was assuring Moses that His covenant with the fathers of Israel was still in effect."[40] As we spend time in the presence of God, he will reveal himself to us through his words.

In Exodus 33:7-11 Moses found solitude outside of the camp. He chose to build a tent of meeting to spend time with and to seek and listen to God. As leaders we should seek God for those we lead so that they also come to the realization that time spent with God on a one-to-one basis is important. God desires relationship with his people. Exodus 33:7 states that the people who sought God went to the tent.

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38. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck, eds., *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: Old Testament* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 1985), 111.

39. Radmacher, Allen, and House, *Nelson's New Illustrated Bible Commentary*, 91.

40. Radmacher, Allen, and House, *Nelson's New Illustrated Bible Commentary*, 91.

Moses showed that there must be a set time and place to meet God. Days might seem busy, but an effort must be made to spend quality time in the presence of God. This is a place communication occurs as we speak to God and God speaks to us. Moses had an experience which can occur only from a relationship of solitude and silence.

## Jacob

Genesis 32:24-32 is the account of Jacob wrestling with God. In times of solitude and silence we should not give up but focus on the reason we are in the presence of God. Jacob's experience with God was at night, a time where soul searching can occur. It can be a time of self-examination, prayer, and devotion. Whatever may have led Jacob to seek for God, he found him. According to one commentator, "Jacob was left alone to face himself before God in his wily self-planning and submission to God. He had to be brought to the end of himself as well as the end of his plans. Before entering the land of inheritance, he had to undergo an experience of utter yieldedness to God [that] would seal him as a man of God and a man of faith."[41] In times of solitude and silence one's desires must be submitted to the desires of God. The author further states, "The purpose of the contest was to break Jacob's will into submission to the divine will—to bring him to see what a poor, feeble worthless creature he was."[42] It was just before the break of day that Jacob got his blessing. This fits with the song of Jabez: "before the day is over, before the night is through." Listening and noticing what God is doing in our lives is important in times of solitude and silence. Do not be afraid to spend time with Almighty God. At times fear of aloneness will come, but all we must do is to hold on to his unchanging hand. "The spiritual

41. Merrill F. Unger, *Unger's Commentary on the Old Testament*, vol. 1, *Genesis-Song of Solomon* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1981), 82.

42. Unger, *Genesis-Song of Solomon*, 82.

crisis enabled [Jacob] to cling to God alone, so that the story of his life elevation above the circumstances through which he might pass."[43]

## Elijah

In 1 Kings 19 we see Elijah, a man of God, running for his life because of fear. "Elijah had entered Jezreel full of hope, but the threat of the enraged [Jezebel] struck fear in his heart. She swore by her evil gods that she would kill the prophet, even as he has killed the prophets of Baal."[44] However, because of his relationship with God he was never left alone even when he felt alone. "Elijah fled a day's journey into the desert. There he sat down under a juniper tree. The prophet's conduct was the result of being left to himself, and being exalted above measure, looking to himself instead of the Lord, as any great man may be tempted to do. For that reason he failed."[45] In times of distress we feel alone, but rest assured God will be there to strengthen us if we should call upon him. One writer states, "God did not forsake his fugitive servant. He watched over him miraculously ministering to his needs. God sent one of His angels to minister to the tired prophet."[46] When we come into a right relationship with God, he promises never to leave us or forsake us. Food was provided for Elijah, and it strengthened him. He was able to walk another forty days and forty nights.

43. Unger, *Genesis-Song of Solomon*, 82.

44. Unger, *Genesis-Song of Solomon*, 481.

45. Unger, *Genesis-Song of Solomon*, 482.

46. Unger, *Genesis-Song of Solomon*, 482.

## John the Baptist

The account in Matthew 3:2 shows that "John the Baptist is another one in the Bible who practiced solitude with God. He was quite a figure. Imagine a man who lives in the wilderness with wild animals, dresses in hairy camel skin tied on by a thick leather belt, and exists on a diet of locusts and wild honey! That's John the Baptist. His message was as austere as his desert surroundings."[47] Luke 1:16-17 made it clear that Zachariah was told in a vision that his wife, Elizabeth, would bear a son who would be a forerunner of Jesus Christ and prepare the people for the coming of Christ. After John the Baptist came out of the desert, he had a mission to prepare the way of the Lord. He was filled with power as he carried out his main role and preached the message of repentance. This message that John had received while in the desert was clear, as it was consistent with the vision that Zachariah had. However, even though John prepared the way, he always made it clear that there is one mightier than him. From this we see a parallel that had been formed between John and Jesus Christ. They both had exceptional births, and preparation for their ministry began in the desert, a lonely place.

## Jesus

Jesus was led by the spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil (Matt 4:11); however, in spite of what the devil tried Jesus overcame the temptations and returned with empowerment. "And Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit into Galilee: and there went out a fame of him through all the region round about" (Luke 4:14-15). In solitude testing will come, but God has a perfect plan in this process.

47. Bill Gaultiere, "Solitude and Silence," SoulShepherding, accessed August 13, 2021, https://www.soulshepherding.org/solitude-and-silence/.

In many passages in the Gospels, we see Jesus going to a solitary place (e.g., Luke 5:16). This exemplifies the need to seek God. Jesus also withdrew when John the Baptist was murdered (Matt 14:13). Jesus recognized that in these times of attack he had to be strengthened by the Father, even though he himself was God. He sought the Father in solitude and silence. And he was able to perform even more miracles than when he had started. It is important for leaders to draw close to God. Attacks will come, but we have to stay focused on the source of our hope. Paul reminds us in Philippians that God's strength is made perfect in our weaknesses. It is in the presence of God, a time of solitude and silence, that we are strengthened. The joy of the Lord is our strength, and in his presence there is fullness of joy.

In Mark 1:35 Jesus withdrew very early in the morning. He never started his journey without spending time with God the Father. The lesson for leaders is to be equipped to carry out a task that is set before us. Look at the person of Jesus. He became human, like us, but is God. Why do leaders believe that they can start the journey without spending time with the true and living God? Life is busy, but we have to find time to slow down to hear from God. Think of a vehicle that is being driven for miles. If the owner does not stop to refuel, the vehicle may break down on the road. So it is for our life. We need the empowerment which can be received only during the discipline of silence and solitude. Through these practices we are enabled by the power of God.

Jesus would pray and ask for God's guidance. He did not just go on; he stopped to notice and listen. As Christian leaders, our daily walk must always include Jesus. We need to listen to our body and our thoughts and most of all to what the Father is saying to us.

Jesus exemplified the need to spend time, even overnight, to discern what God is saying and planning (Luke 6:13-14). Discernment comes through solitude and silence. Upon spending

time with God the Father, Jesus prayed that he could be guided as to who would be his disciples. Jesus could have decided that on his own, but after time spent with the Father, the decision was made as to who would be his twelve disciples. Solitude and silence is an experience in which we acknowledge that nothing we do should be of self, but we must keep in touch with the triune God at all times. Spending quality time before planning is important. Should it be a medical decision, for example, it is best to pray about the situation before committing to undergo surgery. Spend time to discern what God is saying in a particular time of decision. He will give peace during decision making.

When Jesus was about to take on the sins of the world and bear all its pain and sorrows (Luke 22:39-44), this caused him to be anxious and weak. He knew what he was going to experience, but before that he pulled away from his disciples and went to a solitary place. Jesus told them to pray that they not fall into temptation. He knew the outcome before the beginning, and he himself went to pray. Solitude and silence is a means to communicate with God as one prays and listens. Jesus was so sorrowful that he wanted to forfeit the will of the Father; however, he made it quite clear "not my will but thine be done." Suffering should draw us closer to God. We cannot give up in times of despair. We have to seek God to hear what he is saying in a particular situation. Suffering makes us grow from grace to grace. It is by the grace of God that we are not consumed. One must recognize that the will of God for our life takes precedence over our own will and desires. In solitude and silence, we are able to let go of our own desires and trust the desires that God has for our lives. When it is God's will, there will be peace in times of trial and suffering.

Jesus encouraged the disciples to set aside time to rest (Mark 6:30-32). They were to go to a solitary place to rest from all the work they had accomplished. This shows that we too need

to rest from the busyness of life. The disciples were with Jesus, but they had to rest. "Jesus directed them to come with him for a brief, well-earned rest. This was necessary because so many people were coming and going that they had no time to eat."[48]

## Paul

When God called to Paul in this instance, he was in solitude and silence in Arabia to hear from God and to be equipped with power for service (Gal 1:15-17). Paul did not wait to be instructed by the apostles; instead, he wanted to experience the true and living God.

We see Paul in solitude as he wrote to the Ephesians from his prison cell (Eph 3:2). He spent time with the true and living God and received revelation from God. In God's presence, in spite of the circumstances in which we have to experience solitude and silence, we can better know the things of God.

"Paul meditated on God in nature. Probably he often did this in solitude."[49] In silence and solitude we are able to experience God's creation in a different way than usual. We sometimes are left with awe. As long as the right perspective is developed (that "creation is the Lord's" and "not creation is the Lord") it would be reflective to see the beauty of creation and ponder on the goodness of God. In many of the letters written by Paul it is evident that he spent a lot of time in praying for his readers. Prayer leads one into the presence of God, thus permitting a time of silence and being able to listen to God.

Paul must have experienced solitude and silence as he encouraged the brethren: "And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ

48. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck, eds., *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 1983), 130.

49. Bill Gaultiere, "Bible Verses on Solitude and Silence," SoulShepherding, accessed October 5, 2021, https://www.soulshepherding.org/bible-verses-on-solitude-and-silence/. See Romans 1:20.

Jesus" (Phil 4:7). When the mind becomes occupied with internal noise, God will give peace to Christian leaders who spend time in solitude and silence. Christian leaders should be able to take every thought captive when the mind becomes too busy and refuses to settle down. "Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ" (2 Cor 10:5).

## Conclusion

Solitude and silence are an important discipline for a Christian leader, and if this discipline is not practiced one risks doing ministry in one's own strength and not with guidance from the triune God. To ask God for guidance takes stillness, slowing down, removing distractions, and listening and noticing what is happening. God gives guidance to those who seek him: "But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you" (Matt 6:33, KJV). Solitude and silence is where many ministry leaders have taken on the tasks that God has ordained for them. It is during this time that one must be willing to take the time to remove oneself from external noise and be able to sit quietly enough so that the internal noise can be settled and one is able to hear God's still small voice.

Christians' spiritual formation should bring about a change into God's image. Leaders especially should recognize that Jesus exemplified the discipline of solitude and silence during his ministry and thus follow his practice. For change to occur, it is important for Christian leaders to recognize there is a need for action, a need to practice the discipline. The Scripture showed that many of the leaders called by God had to spend time in solitude and silence and had to listen.

Jesus replenished himself during his mission by spending time with the Father. So it is for Christian leaders—we should constantly abide in the vine and be able to be empowered by God to bear fruit. Trials will come, but we will overcome if we place total trust in God during solitude and silence. Further, there is no way that a Christian leader will be able to persevere in ministry without daily seeking God. There must come a time when one recognizes that if there is no rain, a reservoir will run dry. Hence, so it is for Christian believers. There must be a source to draw from, and this can be obtained through solitude and silence. Solitude and silence will empower the believer for service, just as Jesus returned in power after times of solitude.

Solitude and silence is proven in Scripture. At this point, movement will be into the literature to see what different authors have to say about the discipline of solitude and silence. Bear in mind why there is a need for solitude and silence. Acknowledge that God speaks; however, his children need to slow down and listen.

# CHAPTER THREE

# LITERATURE REVIEW

Out of the many books written about spiritual disciplines, several authors have dived into the topic of solitude and silence. Each book had its own focus with reference to others. Some come from the basis of knowledge and include practical means of practicing this discipline of solitude and silence. Reading those books raised four main questions: Should solitude and silence be kept today? When should solitude and silence be kept? How should solitude and silence be kept? By whom should solitude and silence be kept? Out of many books, six are the most significant in the building of this chapter.[1]

A number of other books provided information for this chapter; however, it is difficult to stick to only a few or any set number.[2] Solitude and silence will always be a discipline for all Christians to keep, as the focus is being alone in the presence of the Lord and staying still so that we can hear his voice. This is a principle that Jesus Christ himself exemplified while here on

1. Ruth Haley Barton, *Invitation to Solitude and Silence: Experiencing God's Transforming Presence* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2018); Alan Fadling, *An Unhurried Leader: The Lasting Fruit of Daily Influence* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2017), and *An Unhurried Life: Following Jesus' Rhythms of Work and Rest* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2013); Guy Chmieleski, *Noise. Hurry. Crowds: On Creating Space for God Amidst the Chaos of Campus and Culture* (Franklin, TN: Seedbed Publishing, 2015); Henri H. J. Nouwen, *The Way of the Heart: The Spirituality of the Desert Fathers and Mothers* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 1981); Adam S. McHugh, *The Listening Life: Embracing Attentiveness in a World of Distractions* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2015).

2. In addition to the works most frequently cited in this chapter, other sources are Adele Ahlberg Calhoun, *Spiritual Discipline Handbook: Practices That Transform Us* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005); Carmen Acevedo Butcher, *A Life of St. Benedict: Man of Blessing* (Brewster, MA: Paraclete, 2006); Carlo Carretto, *I, Francis* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1982); Dallas Willard, *Renovation of the Heart: Putting on the Character of Christ* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2012); Eugene H. Peterson, *Christ Plays in Ten Thousand Places: A Conversation in Spiritual Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005); David G. Benner, *Sacred Companions: The Gift of Spiritual Friendship and Direction* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002); Richard J. Foster, *Life with God: Reading the Bible for Spiritual Transformation* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2008), and *Prayer: Finding the Heart's True Home* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 1992); Wayne Muller, *Sabbath: Finding Rest, Renewal, and Delight in Our Busy Lives* (New York, NY: Bantam Books, 1999); Thomas Merton, *Thoughts in Solitude* (New York, NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1999); and Gary Thomas, *Sacred Pathways: Discover Your Soul's Path to God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010).

earth, and his example will aid us as Christians to be transformed into the image of God. Our eternal life is a continuous process, and solitude and silence make us aware of knowing God. With this background, one can consider the first question: whether silence and solitude should be kept today.

## Should Solitude and Silence Be Kept Today?

"The practise of solitude involves scheduling enough uninterrupted time in a distraction-free environment that you experience isolation and are alone with God," a practice which has significance and consequences. "Solitude is a container discipline for the practice of other spiritual disciplines."[3] Solitude and silence have as their purposes building a Christian's relationship with God and with others. This practice enables leaders to seek God in such a way so that the Christian life can have an impact in one's immediate community and in society. Solitude and silence are transformational; during this practice, the way we worship, our work, and rest are constantly affected. Solitude and silence must not be just a here-and-now experience but must be embraced with eternity in mind.

In answering whether solitude and silence should be kept today, it would be important to recognize the impact that solitude and silence have in an individual's life. One effect is that a vital and growing enlivening relationship with God is built out of solitude and silence. Another is that we could see the effect in our churches and the community at large. Also, we could look at the transformational aspect that solitude and silence play as believers live the eternal life.

Building relationship with God is the focus in solitude and silence. To hear from God requires spending time with him. As Christian leaders, building a relationship with the triune God is important. The way of life and the pressures that people undergo during daily life can

3. Calhoun, *Spiritual Discipline Handbook*, 111.

push them to a point where they wish they could live in the presence of God without any distraction in prayer, fasting, and meditation. This is not something practiced much in Christian circles today. However, there are accounts of men and women who practiced a time of hermitage or solitude for numerous years. One such man was Saint Benedict, who spent almost three years of his life in solitude before God. This choice exemplifies a willingness to stay still in the presence of God in order to hear from God, "He became self-reliant and ready with God's help to grapple single handed with the vices of body and mind."[4] A time of solitude with God is a time of total surrender of body, soul, and spirit to God in which we are in God's control. In a world full of distractions, God should be our main focus and hence we should use the example of these desert fathers to practice the exercise of solitude and silence. "What counts is God, and the silence of an environment where God is near."[5]

Silence can be described as "a regenerative practice of attending and listening to God in quiet, without interruption and noise. Silence provides freedom from speaking as well as from listening to words or music."[6] Christian leaders should practice the discipline, for

> silence is an indispensable discipline in the spiritual life. Ever since James described the tongue as a "whole wicked world in itself" and silence as putting a bit into the horse's mouth (James 3:3, 6). Christians have tried to practise silence as the way to self-control. Clearly silence is a discipline needed in many different situations: in teaching and learning, in preaching and worship, in visiting and counselling.[7]

The goals of isolation and stillness are extreme because they confront us on every level of our life. First, "they challenge us on the level of culture."[8] The society we live in is like a

4. Butcher, *A Life of St. Benedict*, 56.

5. Carretto, *I, Francis*, xi.

6. Calhoun, *Spiritual Discipline Handbook*, 171.

7. Nouwen, *The Way of the Heart*, 44.

8. Barton, *Invitation to Solitude and Silence*, 31.

microwave, fast-paced, ever going without stopping. Solitude and silence, however, are times when we lay aside all the busyness of life and turn to God Almighty. In such a fast-paced society, technology, work, and all other distractions can challenge Christian leaders in practicing the discipline of solitude and silence.

Second, "they confront us on the level of our human relationships."[9] Silence and solitude draw us into fellowship with God, separating us from other relationships for a time. However, this is not to say we become isolated and stop doing the will of God. Solitude and silence should result in empowerment. Some Christian leaders find it hard to separate from their family, including children and spouse. Many a times they experience a feeling of abandonment when they leave their young children. For instance, should Christians leaders want to go on a week of retreat they might feel guilty. But they must recognize that if God is drawing them into solitude and silence, there must be a level of trust where all cares and concerns are turned over to the triune God.

Third, the disciplines "challenge us on the level of our soul."[10] This is the time we are able to say, "Search me, O God," and as he reveals to us what is going on inside, we become aware. He will help us to strip the cares of life from ourselves, and instead we cast all our cares upon him. This is the place many are afraid to face as they enter solitude and silence, for all the stories of the past or even the present begin to stir in our minds. The thoughts keep jumping from one thing to the next. But we must remember to cast out every vain imaginings.

9. Barton, *Invitation to Solitude and Silence*, 31.

10. Barton, *Invitation to Solitude and Silence*, 31.

Fourth, the disciplines "draw us into spiritual battle."[11] It is during this time, as we seek God more, that the enemy wants to fight us. But we must be still and know who we are fighting and be aware that the battle is not ours; it belongs to God. Jesus was tempted in like manner after he fasted for forty days and forty nights; however, he overcome the enemy. We know that the battle is the Lord's, because the weapon of our warfare is not carnal but might through God who pulls down strongholds.

Relationship built with Christ will also foster relationship with others. In solitude and silence the love of God can be experienced in such a way that it automatically overflows into love for others. This love for others is enhanced when we can sit and listen to them as we become more acquainted with the voice of God. Solitude and silence enhance discernment and build spiritual friendship. A life built in solitude and silence should result in love coming out of encounter. This love we will experience because we find time to slow down and be attentive to the presence of God. A life of love and care is experienced in knowing God, and this knowing comes out of times of a slow pace.

"When we are experiencing ourselves as the beloved of God, accepted and cherished by him in all of our beauty and brokenness, our hard, rough edges start to soften," Barton concludes. "We begin to see others as beloved as well, and that is what gets reflected back to them when they look into our eyes. Not only does the love of God come to us in solitude, but the love of God also begins to pour through us to others."[12] Solitude and silence do empower us as leaders to share the love of God. As the Lord's beloved, we must have a desire to stay in his presence and to be a conduit to tell others about him.

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11. Barton, *Invitation to Solitude and Silence*, 31.

12. Barton, *Invitation to Solitude and Silence*, 133.

For leaders, God should be foremost, and that is something solitude and silence foster. It should be noted that "God doesn't want to be squeezed into our lives. He desires to be center of it."[13] Such should be our desire for building a relationship with our true and living God, making him first in our lives.

Out of relationship comes worship to and awe for the true and living God. Worship comes from the heart; with solitude and silence both our physical and emotional existence are in relation with God. Not only a part of us is connected, but all our being, and this reality creates transformation. When we "think of God as he is, one cannot but lapse into worship; and worship is the single most powerful force in completing and sustaining restoration in the whole person."[14]

God call's to solitude and silence is a time for rest from the busyness of life. Solitude and silence foster an unhurried life. One will have to work to make that time, however, for the busyness of life affects our relationship with God, hindering us from spending time with him. As leaders within the Christian circle, we might find it hard to work and rest—that is, we prioritize what we do for God over spending time with God. Eugene Peterson states, "We cannot understand either the character or the significance of Sabbath apart from work and workplace. Work doesn't take us away from God: it continues the work of God through us. Sabbath and work are not in opposition: Sabbath and work are integrated parts of an organic whole. Either apart from the other is crippled."[15]

This rest is both physical and spiritual. However, due to what is more of one's focus in life, a little rest or none is achieved. One may tend to hurry in all ways and hence not have enough time to spend in God's presence. How the culture defines us can intensify this tendency.

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13. Chmieleski, *Noise. Hurry. Crowds*, 35.

14. Willard, *Renovation of the Heart*, 107.

15. Peterson, *Christ Plays in Ten Thousand Places*, 115.

As Christian leaders we should not live according to culture and its dictates but by what God desires of us. "Our culture has long conveyed the message that what most defines us is the work that we do, the things we're able to achieve, and the accomplishments we can point to in our lives."[16] Our accomplishments and achievements, even in the church, qualify us, we think, in the sight of God. But what God requires of us is to seek him, to be slow enough to hear from him. How can genuine focus and spending time with God be accomplished? One suggestion is that "we need to learn to see, and understand, the world as God does. We need to consider ways that we can live life counter to our culture. It means that we will need to call into question the paradigms and practices that have led us to this kind of existence."[17]

Jesus exemplified a life of unhurriedness; he did the will of God, but he often withdrew to be with the Father. He did this because he had set his priorities right. He knew that constant fellowship is needed throughout ministry, even though he was God. When we accept that rest is a gift from God, then we will embrace the need for it in this life of hurriedness. Rest should never be seen as a burden but as freedom. Christian leaders should embrace that rest is "freedom from the need to perform; freedom from the need to produce; freedom from the need to be all things; and freedom from the need to please all people."[18]

However, solitude and silence should not be practiced in such a way that we become isolated from the world around us. "Solitude is a tool when we use it to recharge; if we neglect 'the town,' however, we won't be able to reach those who most need our message."[19] A time of solitude and silence should never be seen as a time when we neglect our service for God, it is a

16. Chmeieleski, *Noise. Hurry. Crowds*, 43.

17. Chmeieleski, *Noise. Hurry. Crowds*, 43.

18. Chmeieleski, *Noise. Hurry. Crowds*, 47-49.

19. Thomas, *Sacred Pathways*, 111.

means of equipping in the presence of God and to hear from him as to the next move for his children. Solitude and silence is a time of self-denial, forgetting about self and allowing God to transform us in his presence to be like his son Jesus Christ.

Many people are caught up in that fast pace of life, but if we get the right perspective of who we are in Christ we will embrace solitude and silence, also bearing in mind that God seeks fellowship with us. This fellowship is one of eternity. God wants us to experience eternal life here and now. It must be continuous; solitude and silence help a Christian to experience this. We need to focus on things of God and not on temporary things. As Christians, eternal life does not begin at the time of the rapture or at the marriage supper. Eternal life begins as soon as we come to know Jesus Christ as our personal Savior. Jesus in his prayer for the disciples and for us today (John 17:2-3) emphasizes that eternal life is to know the triune God: "For you granted him authority over all people that he might give eternal life to all those you have given him. Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent."

In solitude and silence, we know God, and in knowing him we are transformed to have eternal purpose as our focus. This experience of eternal life takes time. It is spending time in God's presence through the reading of the Word, prayer, and reflection, which includes other spiritual disciplines. Christian leaders in solitude and silence embrace this eternal life through faith, hope, and gratitude. Knowing the Father is greatly demonstrated through the life of Jesus by the way he did the Father's will, working, preaching, teaching, and spending time with the Father by withdrawing. As Christian leaders we withdraw not to be alone but to be with God; not to become silent and not speak but to listen to God. We understand Fadling's feelings when he

writes, “Of course I didn’t want to be alone or quiet with the negative vision of God I had in my gut at that moment! But, my thoughts continued, eternal life is knowing the Father.”[20]

Can we slow down enough to experience this eternal perspective of solitude and silence? As Christian leaders we must live with the assurance that eternal life is ongoing. Being too busy hinders the process of knowing God and taking the time to slow down and do what we do out of obedience to God. If we do so, we will recognize we are able to do it timelessly. Perseverance is a nugget for living in our eternal life here on earth. A race cannot be participated in with loads and burdens on one’s back, for this will hinder the athlete. So it is it for us as leaders. We cannot persevere in God in the same old ways as we did many years ago. The distractions and cares of life must be set aside to focus on knowing God and experiencing our eternal life. “When I’m living my life always in the fast lane, I find it very hard to fix my eyes upon Jesus—or on anything other than what’s in the lane just ahead of me. But I have found that fixing the eyes of my heart on Jesus has a way of creating in me a holy slowing.”[21]

Solitude and silence give the ability to set our eyes on the things concerning spiritual transformation. Hurry causes us to fix our mind on earthly things. Fadling writes, “When I am hurried, those earthly things seem to get all my attention. I lose sight of the real presence of Christ with me, the actual presence of Christ in me, the presence of the One seated in favor at the Father’s right hand.”[22] As Christian leaders we should have our minds on things that is spiritual even though we are living in this world. An unhurried life will help the believer to be more focus upon God, and this perspective leads us to consider when solitude and silence should be kept.

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20. Fadling, *An Unhurried* Life, 183.

21. Fadling, *An Unhurried Life*, 184.

22. Fadling, *An Unhurried Life*, 185.

## When Should Solitude and Silence Be Kept?

### Listening

While growing up many years ago, I remember my mother (now deceased) saying, "Lorraine, if you don't listen you will fail." In other words, should she correct me about something, she wanted me to acknowledge the correction and not repeat the same thing but to do the right thing.

So it is for us as Christian leaders. There is an expectation from God for us. When he speaks, we ought to listen, and in listening to what he says to act in a particular manner. Listening requires action. It does not make any sense to spend the time to hear from God and yet not be willing to act upon what we hear. God's words are powerful, and Christian leaders are expected to do what they hear in times of silence and solitude. "The nature of God's transcendence, and what separates his words from human words, is not just that God is smarter than we are; it's that God's speech has efficacy. His word has a substance and a power to it, and it has the capacity to actually effect what he desires. God does not just do what he says; what he says, does."[23]

God himself is the Word. The Word spoke; there was a command, and the world was established and came into being. The Word was also in action: the Word became flesh and dwelt among men. The Word was carried out to execute the will of the Father. Jesus the Son was obedient to the point of death. Listening thus requires leaders to give up their will for the will of him who speaks to us in silence and solitude. "The implication for listening is this: If God's self-communication comes in a form of a person, then the nature of our listening must be equally

23. McHugh, *The Listening Life*, 71.

embodied. Our listening must be as incarnate as the Word that has been spoken to us. In a way, our whole lives become ears, receivers for the word of God."[24]

Listening comes out of relationship with another person. One should recognize that communication is a dialogue which involves at least two persons. Hence, whence one speaks there is someone to listen. Key to listening is a heart full of love, and such love is built out of friendship. Many Christian relationships are matured from each person getting to know the other out of time spent in communication and listening. Conversations cannot be too much of words and advice, with no time to listen. In a similar way, knowing God is the essence of our Christian being. Knowing him comes out of relationship. The Scripture states the people who know their God will do his will. But a fire can be extinguished without fuel being added. And there is no way we can speak of God if we do not have a relationship with him. A relationship with Jesus Christ leads to transformation and hence obedience to him.

Christian leaders' personal relationship with God can be affected by our relationship with the things of the world. The world is full of wordiness, business, and technology:

> Our communication is mediated by screens, and too often we lead screen-sized lives, our quality time devoted to our personal technology. Morality becomes the dictate of tangible rules and formulaic answers, buttressed by a black and white world where I'm right and you are wrong. Religion becomes an intellectual assent to a doctrinal system rather than a wholehearted yes to a person.[25]

Technology is the main distraction in our world and hence challenges the Christian leader's inability to sit quietly to hear from God. In such a world there is always the need to attend to our gadgets just to keep up with what is going on.

At this point our worship services become fashioned off another church program. The word preached is based on another preacher's podcast or sermon because there is no time for

24. McHugh, *The Listening Life*, 72.

25. McHugh, *The Listening Life*, 57.

intimacy with God. Prayer is no longer a part of our day; unless we spend the time to listen to God, life becomes unfruitful. Unfruitful life in ministry is not what God expects from Christian leaders. By contrast, time spent in silence and solitude enables us to abide in Christ, the true source of our being. God is the source of our existence, and abiding in God brings forth growth. "When I choose to abide in the true vine, God can use me to point the way to Jesus rather than merely draw attention to myself. When I abide in the true vine, I am able to lead from a place of already being accepted and recognized by my Lord, who died on the cross for me."[26]

There comes a time in life when we want to experience new adventures, new sightseeing, even going on a roller coaster. But even though we want to explore, there is a fear of the unknown. We ask questions, such as, How will I feel? Will I like it? So it is in the life of a Christian. As we mature in Christ, we want to experience his presence even more, even though we do not know what to expect. The only difference from natural fear is that the fear of getting into God's presence will depend on trusting him. Being in silence with God brings on fear. However, what must be understood is that we have to be prepared to accept what he says when he speaks to us. "To truly listen to such a God will involve a radical openness to surprise, to risk, to change, even to suffering."[27] There are times when we need to listen to God but because of our own reluctance to do so we cannot embrace this spiritual rhythm. As Christian leaders our hearts must be open to God who guides and directs through every aspect of our lives. One who refuses to spend time with God and to listen to him can be seen as an example of spiritual deafness. "Spiritual deafness is not an issue with the ability of the ear to hear but with the softness of the

26. Fadling, *An Unhurried Leader*, 95.

27. McHugh, *The Listening Life*, 58.

heart. Those of who live in this intimately personal universe are called to open up our hearts and listen."[28]

The authenticity of what we hear must be clarified. This can be done first through the ability to identify that it is from the God of the Bible. "If it is inconsistent with the voice we meet in scriptures, then we know it is inauthentic. More specifically, we must listen through a Christ filter, remembering that Jesus said Scripture spoke of and pointed to him."[29]

Second, listening should not always be done alone; there are times when solitude and silence can be done in a group. But how could this be possible in the church age that we live in, when all the services are so full of high-energy music and shouting? "Listening is a communal exercise, and we are rightly suspicious when people hear God's direction to them in isolation."[30] Christian leaders should bear in mind that a word spoken to us by God during this time for an audience should not be kept to ourselves but instead should be shared with others in the listening community. "We need the soundboards of others to reflect back what they have heard, to confirm the words we have been given."[31]

Third, reflection is key for us. In listening we should not take what God has given and act on it immediately. Leaders may say it is from the Lord, but at times we should reflect on and contemplate what God is saying at the time and moment. "His words require consideration and careful reflection. We bring all our senses and faculties to bear in the reflection process: reasons,

28. McHugh, *The Listening Life*, 58.

29. McHugh, *The Listening Life*, 63.

30. McHugh, *The Listening Life*, 63.

31. McHugh, *The Listening Life*, 63.

feelings, intuition, the impact on others and the future decisions that will be required by such a response."[32]

Prayer plays an important part in the life of the believer. It is through our praying that we communicate with God. But one must realize that communication is a dialogue, not a monologue. Hence, we believers need to listen when in solitude and silence. How can we listen in these times when our lives are plagued with noise and busyness? If we practice listening when we pray, we will also be willing to listen to others. Listening to others builds relationship. One cannot be selfish: to want to talk and not give the other time to speak.

## Examen

In solitude and silence there comes a time when we must examine our consciousness. To examine consciousness is a means by which we come to the acknowledgment that God is always with us. "The examen is a time of prayerful reflection on one's experience of the presence of God over recent hours. The reason it is called an examination of consciousness is that its goal is the transformation of consciousness by increasing awareness of God's presence."[33] As I reflect, my understanding has been enlightened in such a way that I am made aware that this self-examen is practicing the presence of God. We allow the Holy Spirit to take us through a period of the day where we sit and reflect on what took place in certain situations.

One writer agrees that the prayer of examen is "like the two sides of a door. The first is an examen of consciousness through which we discover how God has been present to us throughout the day and how we have responded to his loving presence. The second aspect is an examen of conscience in which we uncover those areas that need cleansing, purifying, and

32. McHugh, *The Listening Life*, 64.

33. Benner, *Sacred Companions*, 113.

healing."[34] In other words, the prayer examen can point out how we responded to the awareness of God in our day. For example, if a song was placed in my spirit, did it bring joy to my soul? Or, a Scripture verse came just in time when I was dealing with a particular situation during the day; how did I react. On the other hand, examen can reflect how God spoke to me about doubting myself in compiling my work. Should I be so busy that I did not take the time for examen, my doubts will start to lead to fear of the unknown. God will guide us as we build relationship with him.

Calhoun states that "the question of the examen opens our attention to how God's internal movement is present in our external comings and goings. They lead us to listen deeply to the data of our lives. These questions help us pay attention to our mental state, our responses and our emotional baggage."[35] With this in mind we are able to enter into God's presence and ask different questions which will focus on what we are grateful for during the day and how we used the day to praise and honor God. The bottom line is that it gives us the ability to see what is happening in our lives all day.

## Discernment

In solitude and silence the spiritual discipline of discernment is readily utilized. Spending time in God's presence increases our trust in him and thereby makes a leader more aware and discerning, as Ruben P. Job states:

> Discernment for the Christian community begins with the individual Christian. Do I want to know God's will more than anything else? This question is the entryway into discernment. And it can be answered with affirmation only by those who love God and have learned to trust God. If we have any higher priority in our search for God's guidance, we will not be able to trust our discernment. I must spend enough time in

34. Foster, *Prayer*, 27-28.

35. Calhoun, *Spiritual Discipline Handbook*, 53.

> prayer and faithful listening to the voice of God to be brought to that moment of trust and surrender when I can give up my preconceived ideas and become open to God's idea. Can Christians know God's will? Can the Church know God's will? Can our congregation know God's will? Nearly two thousand years of experience shout a resounding yes![36]

Trusting God comes from close relationship that is built over a period of time because one gets the opportunity to be with him and to listen to his voice.

One experiences the spirit of discernment by time spent with God, whether it is in a retreat, in solitude and silence, or whatever the means of practicing the presence of God. George Ganss states that the principle of discernment acts in a person's life through experiences of retreat. Discernment comes out of consolation and desolation. Spiritual consolation and desolation should not be determined by our emotions and our senses. In discernment there must be a connection with the triune God. There are times when discernment sets in and we tend to want to base what God is saying on what we are seeing or feeling through the natural senses. However, consolation in discerning is sometimes misunderstood. "Any feeling of joy, satisfaction, or peace is taken, often too hastily, as a good spirit's sign of approval for some option. This overlooks the distinction between spiritual and non-spiritual consolation and often leads to false discernment, selfishness, or rationalization of less good conduct."[37]

As Christian leaders, we must be in intimacy with God through the discipline of solitude and silence to hear what God is saying to us in making our decisions. "Discernment is a growing awareness, attentiveness to: His Divine Invitation—to come close, draw near, follow Him into a deeper place of intimacy and companionship. His Divine Intention—as we live out our 'rule of

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36. Stephen Macchia, "Spiritual Discernment: A Way of Life for Leaders and Teams," Residency 3 Lectures and Presentations: Spiritual Formation – 4283, David Currie and Steve Macchia, accessed December 2021, instructure.com.

37. George E. Ganss, *The Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius: A Translation and Commentary* (Chicago: IL, Loyola Press, 1992), 193.

life' we fulfill His will for our lives on a daily basis and throughout our lifetime."[38] This desire to discern raises the matter of attentiveness and how to keep solitude and silence.

## How Should Solitude and Silence Be Kept?

### Attentiveness

Solitude and silence are a discipline that God wants from his children. We must realize this and be attentive to it. Solitude and silence draw us closer to God. Drawing close to God should always be a part of our growing in Christ, and this will be done only as individuals want to be obedient to God's Word. Hebrews 10:22 urges Christians to "draw near to God." To follow this admonition, "seeking God in solitude and stillness, meditating on God's Word, and devotion to prayer are central to the life of the people of God."[39] When one is aware of this, then the individual will be convicted to do the disciplines if that person was not doing them before.

But how seriously do we take our spiritual life? Are we listening to God, or are we going on as we have, like a puppet on a string? God needs our undivided attention, so we must be at a place where we recognize we need God in our life. "In solitude God begins to free us from our bondage to human expectations, for there we experience God as our ultimate reality—the one in whom we live and move and have our being."[40] Solitude frees us from the norm of life and brings us to a place where we begin to see the need for God in our everyday life. Further, solitude and silence go hand in hand. "Silence deepens the experience of solitude. In silence we not only withdraw from the demands of life in the company of others but also allow the noise of

38. Macchia, "Spiritual Discernment."

39. Foster, *Life with God*, 111.

40. Barton, *Invitation to Solitude and Silence*, 34.

our own thoughts, strivings, and compulsions to settle down so we can hear a truer and more reliable voice."[41]

In solitude and silence, we should be aware that the presence of God is manifested in us through his Son Jesus Christ; we enter God's presence with a heart of thankfulness; in the presence of the Lord there is safety, protection, and deliverance; dwelling in the presence of God in solitude and silence brings knowledge of God; in God's presence there is fullness of joy. With this attentivness all we must do is to invite God into our midst. Barton referred to the writings of M. Basil Pennington, who stated, "But if we invite him with attention, opening the inner spaces with silence he will speak to our souls not in words or concepts, but in the mysterious way that love expresses itself—by presence."[42] As we enter into a time of solitude and silence, the good, the bad, and the ugly will begin to surface, but are we going to run away and stop the discipline? We should be encouraged to sit quietly before God, for he is the one who calls us into this time, and he is the one who will carry out the process. All that is coming up in our mind will begin to settle while we are silent before God. This is referred to as spiritual law of gravity. "When we sit quietly in God's presence, the sediment that is swirling in our souls begins to settle. We don't have to do anything but show up and trust the spiritual law of gravity that says, Be still, and the knowing will come."[43]

## Resistance

How much do we crave God's presence? Yes, he is omnipresent, but how much time do we want to spend with him? What are the hindrances that would nudge us to step away from

41. Barton, *Invitation to Solitude and Silence*, 34.

42. Barton, *Invitation to Solitude and Silence*, 35.

43. Barton, *Invitation to Solitude and Silence*, 37.

such a discipline? These questions and many more will go over and over in our minds as we try to cultivate God's presence. Fear and anxiety will come upon us. However, we will have to give these emotions over to God. This might not be the end to fear, because there might be a fear of meeting with God. "Once we place our cares and concerns into God's care, we may be surprised by a more subtle concern: fear of experience of solitude."[44] Fear of all measures and types will surface, and we might want to give up. As we seek more of God, we will experience many hindrances. But "listening to our fears rather than ignoring them can give us a great deal of insight into the conscious and unconscious resistance we have toward solitude and silence."[45]

In these instances the advice of Thomas Merton can encourage us. "The solitary life is a life in which we cast our care upon the Lord and delight only in the help that comes from Him. Whatever he does is our joy. We reproduce his goodness in us by our gratitude."[46]

## Rest

Solitude and silence should be undertaken in a time when we know we must slow down and be at rest with God. One might think that slowing down and stopping is a waste of time, but the body needs both physical rest and spiritual rest. Rest for the believer was ordained by God from the beginning of creation and should continue right to the time of his second coming, when we will experience eternal rest with our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

God showed us a perfect example of rest when he created the world. After the sixth day he rested; one writer says, "God knows the value of rest. He himself rested, and he has designed

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44 . Barton, *Invitation to Solitude and Silence*, 46.

45 . Barton, *Invitation to Solitude and Silence*, 48.

46. Merton, *Thoughts in Solitude*, 109.

us to rest, and to rest regularly."[47] We should follow God's example for resting from our work. Rest gives rejuvenation for the work that is set before us. Also, in times of resting there is the opportunity to notice and listen to God. Living in a fast-paced society hinders God's people from entering a time of rest. Many people have become workaholics who think that the more they do, the more they will achieve. That is true to a point, but how faithful are we to the work done? Are we trying to do it for God? This is not new for us in this age—when the people of Israel were under Egyptian bondage, they were placed under great distress due to continuous work.

Rest is a here-and-now reality. It should not be set aside for the end of life. It is not for us when we get to heaven. God requires us to rest and take care of our bodies here and now. Rest is essential in the life of the believer. A car will not run efficiently if it is not taken in for service, and so it is in the life of a believer. There must be time set aside to rest so that we can be empowered for God's purposes. God expects us to receive the gift of rest.

Doing more and more work without rest cannot be beneficial. However, many people have fallen under the bondage of slavery to the expectations of self or society. The culture we live in plays a role in how we view rest, and so rest is not easy to achieve. According to Fadling, "We have a lot of restlessness in us. And since you and I live in a culture that tends to measure people by what they do, the prospect of resting, of doing nothing for the season, can feel like volunteering for a loss of identity."[48] But this should not hinder us from resting. Our life should not be consumed by what others think of us but by what is pleasing to God. Let us exemplify a life of being and not a life of doing.

47. Fadling, *An Unhurried Life*, 109.

48. Fadling, *An Unhurried Life*, 111.

When we fail to be restful, that shows us that we are not trusting God. "The Israelites failed to enter into God's rest because they chose to test God instead of trust him."[49] As Christians, when we trust in our own work, we lose confidence and trust in God. Resting and trusting God is a means of empowerment. Rest slows us down make us focus more on God and on people, and so relationship and intimacy are created. In the time of rest we grow in our love for God as we are better able to know him.

Technology has played a part in our lives as to slowing down and resting. Instead of trying to take time to rest we seek to find more things to do. "Technology has indeed enabled us to do certain kinds of work in less time. We have not, however, taken advantage of this gift to make more space for sabbath leisure."[50]

Ministry leaders must recognize what drives them to work. Is it to achieve, or is it to do ministry work? The former persons have based their life on culture and the latter have based their life and work upon God. Drivenness to achieve more leads one to live a life of anxiety. So, we do and we do because this is the demand of work; hence there is no time to rest. This can be very hard on the body, because ministers then reach a time where they may get stressed and burned out. By contrast, when work is done unto God and is driven by God, we do so in grace and accomplish what is set out to do. Hence there is time to rest. "In trust we received grace as a living center, meaning we recognize that work is not demanded but given, and rest is not deserved but given. Rest and work are both gifts from God."[51] Not until we recognize that work will never finish will we embrace times of rest.

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49. Fadling, *An Unhurried Life*, 112.

50. Fadling, *An Unhurried Life*, 113.

51. Fadling, *An Unhurried Life*, 119.

As Wayne Muller states, “Sabbath requires surrender, if we only stop when we are finished with all our work, we will never stop—because our work is never completely done. If we refuse rest until we are finished, we will never rest until we die. Sabbath dissolves the artificial urgency of our days, because it liberates us from the need to finish.”[52] Work completion will never end, and Sabbath rest is a command by God. Only in times of rest that we are able to be more focus in solitude and silence.

## Release

Have you ever thought that after a time of rest you may now be able to see more clearly? In solitude and silence, we reach a point that we must be true to our self and to God. Nothing is hidden. After our mind, soul, and body find rest it will be time to recognize that a task is about to be given. The empowerment for service sets in. “This guidance for the renewal of body and soul has been only a beginning: there is a journey ahead, and it is not just any journey. It is actually a quest that will be rather demanding, requiring all the strength and stamina I have gained in rest.”[53] In times of solitude and silence we reach a point where we release ourselves from doing and start depending upon God to do his perfect will. There is no need to rely on self but now a need to rely on God.

In solitude and silence, we can refocus on what is God’s plan for our lives, refusing to focus on negative thoughts and circumstances. Barton states, “Once we get a little rest, we start to get our perspective back. Rather than reacting to everything around us, we start to have a sense of what is truly called for in our life.”[54] Resting brings us back to the true purpose of life.

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52. Muller, *Sabbath*, 82-83.

53. Barton, *Invitation to Solitude and Silence*, 86.

We are able to overlook the small things and pay attention to that which God has called us to do. It requires walking away from situations that would overshadow us and walking in a place of emptiness where all one can hear is the voice of God. Elijah is a perfect example: he was a man who walked in the desert. This must have been very lonely, but his experience shows that we must go through trying times and into places where we feel all alone to embrace what God has in store for us. The desert, literal or metaphorical, becomes a place of new experiences. "Our spiritual journey must lead through the desert or else our healing will be the product of our own will and wisdom."[55]

It is in these places that we recognize our brothers and sisters cannot help. We are able to hear more clearly. Our total dependence is upon God. No longer do we need to hide under the busyness of life, but we cling to the one who can fill our empty hearts. This is as a result of releasing ourselves into the hand of the Lord and allowing him to take full control of the situation. Emptiness and release in times of solitude and silence can be painful; however, in these times God will fill us with that which he wants, as Barton points out: "While the experience of being empty is painful, emptiness is a prerequisite to being filled. The presence of God is poured out most generously when there is space in our souls to receive him."[56] Emptiness creates room for God. Our prayer life becomes different, because, according to Merton, "You pray best when the mirror of your soul is empty of ever image except the Image of the Invisible Father."[57]

Once we continue to bear the emptiness of our life, we must realize that it is a process, and processes take time. This is where we recognize that we will have to be still and wait on

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54. Barton, *Invitation to Solitude and Silence*, 86.

55. Barton, *Invitation to Solitude and Silence*, 88.

56. Barton, *Invitation to Solitude and Silence*, 92.

57. Merton, *Thoughts in Solitude*, 111.

God. Waiting can be hard, but solitude and silence require waiting and listening, noticing what is happening around us. In times of solitude and silence we are able to face ourselves to tell God what he already knows. "This willingness to see ourselves as we are and to name it in God's presence is at the very heart of the spiritual journey. But it takes time, time to feel safe enough with ourselves and with God to risk exposing the tender, unfinished places of the soul."[58] In waiting we must reach a point at which we trust God wholeheartedly. We become open to him rather than not hiding from him. No matter what is in us or around us, we must recognize that we cannot fix ourselves to enter God's presence. He wants us to come as we are and feel safe in his tender arms. When we can acknowledge that we are nothing and that God cares in spite of our shortcomings, we can say, "Thank you, Lord!"

## Refocusing

Solitude and silence help us to refocus in such a way that we forget about self and face the one who truly loves and accepts us for who we are. In this time we recognize God is the one we can sit in front of bare and willing to empty ourselves. An experience like this comes only with someone who truly loves and cares for us. To be honest, many of us would not want to sit bare before a sibling, a husband or wife, or fellow believers in Christ, for one might become judgmental about what we have to say. However, this is different when we pour out ourselves to the Lord. He understands and gives an attentive ear and corrects and guides as we process by the Holy Spirit.

Detachment from things that we are attached to is important during solitude and silence. The things we are attached to can hinder us from refocusing, as we sometimes use these things to define ourselves. Such attachments include but are not limited to money, work, status, family,

58. Barton, *Invitation to Solitude and Silence*, 88.

friends, and even self. When we embrace solitude and silence, we recognize that attachments can hinder us from receiving from the Lord. When we recognize this fact, we can become detached. According to Calhoun, detachment is a "means of replacing the attachment to 1) idolatrous relationships and 2) self-serving goals and agendas for success, money, power, ego, productivity and image with wholehearted attachment to and trust in God alone."[59] Solitude and silence helps us to empty ourself and know that we have to trust God.

## Who Should Keep Solitude and Silence?

As it was practiced by biblical characters and Jesus Christ himself, solitude and silence should be kept by all those who want to become true followers of Christ. This what God wants of his children: to be in constant fellowship with him. Many people have argued that Christians do not have to seek God and get close to him by withdrawing for times of solitude. Taking into consideration that we all do and experience things differently, it can be helpful to look at this relationship with God from the perspective of characteristics that an individual may possess. Believers can be placed in categories as follows (but not limited to): naturalists, traditionalists, ascetics, caregivers, enthusiasts, and contemplatives.

There are Christian leaders who experience God through creation, and they are referred to as naturalists. The naturalist experiences God through creation, bearing in mind that God is not the trees, sun, or moon but that he is the creator of all things. For naturalists, the creation gives awe to the triune God and reminds us of how marvelous his acts and his powers are. As naturalists, the creation reminds us that God is to be worshipped and that he is the only one who brought creation into being. The psalmist reminds us that the heaven declares the glory of God. A Christian leader who is a naturalist can experience God in solitude and silence in what he sees

59. Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook*, 95.

in creation. However, "The earth is the Lord's," not "The earth is the Lord." Once there is the right perspective on creation, such a leader will worship God in spirit and in truth. "Where we worship can have a profound impact on the quality of our worship. The naturalist seeks to leave the formal architecture and the padded pews to enter an entirely new 'cathedral,' a place that God himself has built: the outdoors."[60]

Experiencing solitude and silence by observing creation, one will have to listen for God's still small voice, because "God will speak to us through creation if we will only listen."[61] As we allow ourselves to be more attentive and listen to God, we will have more clarity as we grow to know God more. With clearer focus and listening we will recognize that we can rest in God. However, bear in mind that the outdoors only helps us to grow in relationship with God; it should not replace our relationship with him. Susan Power Bratton writes,

> Experiencing the beauty and peace of God in nature is not a substitute for direct interaction with the regenerative powers of the Creator, but . . . the mending and binding so necessary to heal our stressed-filled lives may flow through creation. For the spiritually oppressed or the socially injured, a pleasing or quiet natural environment can help provide spiritual release. Resting by a clear, free-running river or sitting on a sunny slope in a blooming desert grassland can bring peace and joy into very clouded souls.[62]

The naturalist may also be an ascetic who practices solitude and silence. However, ascetics tend to want a quieter experience. Monks are usually referred to ascetics, but their way of quietness can be experienced in a life of inner detachment even within a busy and noisy environment. "Ascetics have an important lesson for the church and society. Seeking God entails some sort of separation from the world, even if that separation is expressed solely by inner

60. Thomas, *Sacred Pathways*, 44.

61. Thomas, *Sacred Pathways*, 47.

62. Thomas, *Sacred Pathways*, 50, quoting Susan Power Bratton, *Christianity, Wilderness, and Wildlife* (Scranton, PA: University of Scranton Press, 1993), 35.

detachment."[63] No matter what is going on around ascetics, they are able to meet God in spite of the distractions.

An enthusiast is one who sees worship to God in a way of expectancy. Enthusiasts attend service expecting God to move in a special way. They expect God to answer their prayers, and if they do not get an answer in their timing, they feel like God is not hearing them. Enthusiasts love crowded areas and noise and do not have the time to listen to God when he speaks in a service. However, when they are tarrying in the spirit, they do so in silence and wait patiently to hear from God. An enthusiast does not like a service that is programmed; enthusiasts believe in a service of celebration in praise and thanksgiving to the Lord. However, this celebration might exclude the triune God, as no one is able to stop and listen. Solitude and silence might become a difficult task for enthusiasts unless they embrace the principle that God seeks relationship and relationship is built out of regularly spending time with God by different spiritual exercises.

The Christians who experience contemplation give adoration to God and see him as a lover and a friend. Contemplatives see God's presence as the source of their life; hence they spend quality time in his presence. They never feel alone. They always believe that God is with them, so they practice the presence of God. According to Thomas, "Contemplatives simply want to bathe in the ocean of Love God has for his children, while the rest of us seem sadly content to experience that love drop by drop."[64] The contemplative finds the practice of solitude and silence of spending time with one they love. In other words, they experience God as the lover of their soul.

With these experiences many Christians still find it hard to practice the discipline of solitude and silence. This is due to the technologically inclined and fast-paced society that we

63. Thomas, *Sacred Pathways*, 126.

64. Thomas, *Sacred Pathways*, 193.

live in. Many find it difficult to be alone and to be detached from those things that keep on going without slowing down. However, in solitude and silence, "we allow ourselves to be stripped away from the pieces of this world that seek to shape us and form us into an image other than God's."[65] As soon as we are convicted that this is not what God wants from us, "we allow God to shine a bright light into the recesses of our life in ways that brings clarity, healing, and a necessary reordering of life."[66]

Solitude and silence should be embraced as one of the spiritual disciplines that will foster the presence of God in our lives. However, one's denomination may determine how a particular person experiences God in solitude and silence. A Pentecostal's experience may be different from other that of people in other denominations. Of a certainty, Pentecostals who are considered enthusiasts or traditionalists may not embrace a time to sit in solitude and silence.

With all that is covered from the different authors it has been confirmed that solitude and silence is a discipline that transforms a Christian in the likeness of Jesus Christ. In the discipline of solitude and silence, Christians have to see themselves where they are and be willing to become what is expected from them. Solitude and silence built out of relationship with God will enable an individual to trust God and leave everything in his hands. We cannot do anything to aid spiritual formation but trust the only true and living God who is able to do more than we can ask or ever imagine. The next chapter will explore the project that will answer the hypothesis of this thesis-project and analyse the findings as they come to light. This project will be done in a small-group setting.

65. Chmeieleski, *Noise. Hurry. Crowds*, 75.

66. Chmeieleski, *Noise. Hurry. Crowds*, 75.

# CHAPTER FOUR

# THE PROJECT: SOLITUDE AND SILENCE IN COMMUNITY

This research proposes that spiritual formation will be enhanced by the practice of the discipline of solitude and silence. The challenges Christians face daily can be offset by slowing down, paying attention to our thoughts and emotions, noticing what God is saying to us, and most of all seeking him in spirit and in truth. The purpose of this thesis-project is to identify these challenges, to explore the findings, and to use that knowledge to eliminate hindrances to spiritual formation.

This chapter will describe the make-up of the project, the participants involved, the meetings of the participants, and how the discipline of solitude and silence was done in group settings and in their practices alone at home. The group met for eight weeks. At the outset the plan was to meet at the church on a Saturday for two hours; however, after the first week, due to the current pandemic, meetings were held on Zoom, with one session used for a whole-day retreat. Each week of study will be outlined, and participant responses will be shared from journals submitted by the participants.

## Solitude and Silence in Community

As with many other spiritual disciplines, the practice of solitude and silence by individuals can be challenging. This may be because individuals may find it hard to be alone for any long period of time. When considering the project my aim was to use a book that would draw participants' attention to seeking more of God. Hence the idea of a group was determined.

The project involved ten participants who met in a group where the practice of solitude and silence was the focus. The group met weekly; the facilitator gave clear instruction each week in advance as to the chapters to be read before the meeting for that week. Chapters of the book would be discussed, and questions asked where the participants interacted and shared their ideas. Before the start of the meeting one spiritual exercise was used to introduce the lesson, such as lectio divina, spiritual reading, contemplative Bible reading, or breath prayer, which then led to a time of silence. Participants were also asked to maintain a journal, as they were to give answers to questions given out at the end of each session. These journals were completed and turned in (by eight participants) at the end of the given time. Therefore, the data include that which was received during the meetings and the participants' responses in the journal.

## The Group Make-up

The participants are members of the Church of God of Prophecy, Grand Cayman. The group included five married women, two married men, and three single women. All the participants were from a working-class background. Some worked full-time in ministry while others worked outside the church.

## The Process

The consensus was to meet on Saturdays for seven weeks in the church conference room. However, due to the pandemic there was a change, and we had to meet on Zoom for six weeks. The book we studied together was *Invitation to Solitude and Silence: Experiencing God's Transforming Presence* by Ruth Haley Barton.[1] Each participant was given a copy of this book,

1. Ruth Haley Barton, *Invitation to Solitude and Silence: Experiencing God's Transforming Presence* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2018).

which was used in each meeting session and in preparation for each week. The book includes a group guide on sharing solitude and silence. The group focus was to read the book, review and reflect on the material given in the book, and then discuss and answer questions. The book encourages individuals to open each session with silence and spiritual listening. In the reflecting and discussion period, the facilitator organized small presentations where questions were asked and answers given. Each session was recorded, as permission was given by each participant. Each meeting ended with take-away points and a time of silence and prayer. At the end of each session, participants were provided with questions and a practice to be included in their week of preparation for the next meeting. Participants were given a book, pen, and highlighter for journaling their thoughts and answers to questions on a weekly basis. November 13, 2021, was the date given to participants to turn in the journal; however, up to January 31, 2022, only six journals had been turned in out of ten. The others were turned in later.

In addition to sharing solitude and silence in a group, another focus of this project was to explore the limitations for spiritual formation related to the discipline of solitude and silence. Individuals would identify how well they appreciate or do not appreciate this discipline in their daily lives. The project will also show the need to practice the discipline of solitude and silence in individual life and in community. The journals and discussion sessions confirmed what these practices seem to have less impact upon.

## Week 1: Introduction and Foreword[2]

Participants were welcomed to the meeting by the facilitator. The focus and study of the book were introduced. The name of the author was stated, and a brief synopsis of the discipline of solitude and silence was also explained by the facilitator. This was done to introduce a time of

2. September 4, 2021.

silence as we began our session. Participants were asked to be in silence for five minutes, after which the participants shared their views on this, their first experience. The main idea shared among the group was their inability to grab hold of their minds, they could not concentrate.

The first question that was asked in the group was, What are your thoughts and feelings as you hear the words "solitude" and "silence"? The responses differed, but the main thought was being deliberate and intentional and being still. However, participants were encouraged to make notes in their journals. Some of the responses follow:

> Solitude suggests being by oneself, aloneness, removed from action or activities absence of distractions. Silence makes me think of absence of sound stillness or quietness. The words solitude and silence bring the mind a feeling of peace and serenity. These words also bring the mind clarity of thoughts.[3]
>
> Solitude in my opinion is finding that place of peace within you and a physical space to just spend time with the Lord. Silence is being quiet blocking out all distractions which should include your own thoughts and listen for the voice of the Lord speaking to you. Being able to listen is a vital part of silence.[4]
>
> When I hear the words solitude and silence I think about a quiet place. A space which is reserved as a getaway from the busyness of today's lifestyle. For me solitude does not have to be a far place. Which is tucked away. It can be just that area where I go to have that one-on-one time with God and my thoughts.[5]
>
> Trying to find moments and space to shut myself down. Being away from my clutter on the inside to grab a hold on what God is saying to me.[6]
>
> Solitude recalls aloneness. I love my family and enjoy being with them but there are times when I look forward to being able to be in the house all by myself with focus on the Lord; then I do my own thing to worship in tears, with laughter or singing as I feel led. I remain quiet as long as I want to, without feeling that I must please others. It is time between the Lord and I.[7]

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3. Each person's journal was assigned an alphanumeric indicator. ISS [Invitation to Solitude and Silence Journal] 003. personal journal entry, September 4, 2021.

4. ISS 004, personal journal entry, September 4, 2021.

5. ISS 007, personal journal entry, September 4, 2021.

6. ISS 005, personal journal entry, September 4, 2021.

7. ISS 006, personal journal entry, September 4, 2021.

> Peace, quietness no distraction is this time productive? what to do just sit there? sit there and do what? Pray. I think my mind would wonder while in solitude and silence. My mind is always going and always thinking. I doubt sitting in solitude and silence will quiet my mind. I always find myself singing when praying too.[8]

> The thoughts that come to mind as I hear the words solitude and silence is one sitting in a cross-leg position with their hands folded or clasped similar to the position of persons doing yoga or a monk. I also think of solitude has been in privacy not having anything or anyone to disturb you.[9]

Another question was, What are you looking for and anticipating as you commit yourselves to this project? There were different views among the participants, but the one most frequently stated is being still in the presence of God and spending more time with God.

> I am anticipating hearing the voice of God and to hear the experience of the others in the group. I want to learn these two disciplines and apply them to my daily living. I know God is a God that speaks, but he will only speak when we are still, when we stop talking, when we are still enough to listen to him. I am looking forward for the great benefits I will attain from this time of being silent.[10]

> Knowing when to be still and to remain silent. When things are pressing on me just knowing when to be silent. Asking of God and being able to wait in his presence.[11]

> I am looking forward to learning and understanding more about solitude and silence. I am also looking for practical experience to practice spending meaningful time in silence and solitude. Listening to the Lord and seeking him more as I go through the process with which be on my daily agenda.[12]

> My expectations for committing myself to this project is that I will grow in spending time in the presence of the Lord and that I may learn from others some good practices in relation to spending time with God.[13]

> I'm looking forward to learning a new discipline and a new way for me to commune with God. it will be an experiment for sure.[14]

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8. ISS 002, personal journal entry, September 4, 2021.

9. ISS 008, personal journal entry, September 4, 2021.

10. ISS 008, personal journal entry, September 4, 2021.

11. ISS 005, personal journal entry, September 4, 2021.

12. ISS 004, personal journal entry, September 4, 2021.

13. ISS 007, personal journal entry, September 4, 2021.

Participants stated that by making a commitment they are looking forward to its effect on life.

> I am often inconsistent, rushing and procrastinating for a later time in the day that may never come to pass, but for this project I am part of a group, and I gave my word of commitment to practice silence and solitude, knowing that it will certainly be good for my spiritual development and well-being.[15]

> I believe that nothing is impossible with God, therefore as I begin this journey of solitude and silence, I am looking forward to a new lease on life covering with the new fun love that will present itself as I traverse this journey.[16]

Other participants stated that they would prefer to keep an open mind on entering into this project.

> As the aim is for a close better walk with God, I'm approaching the project with an open mind thereby allowing God to do what he wants to do in my life in season. In some cases, expectations can lead to disappointments being always open to the leading of God usually a better choice. Having a specific defined expectation could result in missing out on what God is doing in one's life during the period. Sometimes our experiences with God have more to do with our expectation than what God can do.[17]

In the foreword to Barton's book, Dallas Willard quotes Blaise Pascal as saying, "All the unhappiness of men arises from one single fact that they cannot stay quietly in their own room, so they turn to diversions to distract themselves."[18] The question to the participants was, Can you relate?

> Dallas Willard's viewpoint on page 11 is quite evident in our culture today most of the population especially the teens and young adults aim to rest through excitement. The ideal quiet time for these persons is attached to a device which provides some number of distractions.[19]

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14. ISS 002, personal journal entry, September 4, 2021.

15. ISS 006, personal journal entry, September 4, 2021.

16. ISS 00W, personal journal entry, September 4, 2021.

17. ISS 003, personal journal entry, September 4, 2021.

18. Barton, *Invitation to Solitude and Silence*, 11.

19. ISS 007, personal journal entry, September 4, 2021.

> Things have changed so much over time, as it is now, we are living the world that fast pace "if you blink you miss out on something." We struggle with being quiet, more so finding the time to be quiet. My own life most times reflects this trying to keep up with everything that I need to do in the limited time I have to do it, often leaves no time for silence and solitude and indeed caused a great deal of unhappiness.[20]

> I believe the enemy knows the power of silence. And he tries to distract us with everything that can keep us away from solitude and silence. The technological society is a big distraction.[21]

> True, in our culture people find it difficult to stay quiet, there are so many things that demand people's attention, particularly those who live in the urban areas, cities and towns. There are numerous sources of excitement, gadgets with notification sounds and charismatic people with what they consider to be important.[22]

> Our culture is not geared very much towards quietness and stillness generally, as the current norm is to be more and to do more. There is also the fact that there's so much vying for our attention, whether it is social media, work, family, church, or other commitments if not properly managed we will find ourselves in an ongoing cycle of just doing and doing more with no time to stop, think, reflect, and most importantly connect with God. Current culture requires that we keep up with the latest news or happening around here there is multiple sources and so many different means or methods to view listen to that there is a constant flow of noise.[23]

The next question asked was, What are some of these distractions that you notice in your own life that prevent you from entering solitude and silence? This question was asked so as to see how distractions challenge one from entering a time of solitude and silence. The responses were as follows:

> Distractions vary—cell phone notification-ignored. Requests from other family members if they were not informed of what I was seeking to do. Rising early in the morning made a difference, then all is quiet, and distractions are less. If there is the need to attend to some business early, rush is on to avoid being caught in traffic jam.[24]

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20. ISS 004, personal journal entry, September 4, 2021.

21. ISS 008, personal journal entry, September 4, 2021.

22. ISS 006, personal journal entry, September 4, 2021.

23. ISS 003, personal journal entry, September 4, 2021.

24. ISS 006, personal journal entry, September 4, 2021.

> Distractions in my life include work responsibilities, families' responsibilities concern about what is happening in the world concerns about family and friends.[25]
>
> Continually thinking about my family (how they are). Is everything OK with them? Do they need anything? What I need to do for them? Work related matters, my health, and the health of my parents.[26]
>
> Whenever I try to enter silence, my thoughts continuously stray to activities I need to get done, my family member my job a place of interest or some fun activity that I have previously engaged in or even a previous conversation. I constantly have to be pulling back my thoughts to the place where I want to be which is in the presence of God.[27]
> I am a very busy person I love to do housework, so I am always busy. I am distracted by work even if I sit to take five minutes break, I am thinking what else do I need to do. I can relate with the author, always wanting to be doing something. Housework, television, telephone, life on a whole is totally demanding and keeps me from entering solitude and silence.[28]

## Week 2: Solitude and Silence as Attentiveness[29]

We started the second week with a practice of contemplative Bible reading. This exercise included a time of reading and listening, meditating, praying, and contemplating for five minutes. The aim of this exercise was to practice the heart of silence and listening to hear what God was saying to each participant. Different thoughts and feelings arose out of this exercise, but the main thought from the participants was their inability to keep quiet and be able to listen due to the distractions in their minds. The practice was to be continued by the participants at home for one week; however, from the journaling it is evident that many started but could not continue for the entire week as the demands of their day had to be completed. Many shared that by the middle of the week they were tired and were unable to focus to do the practice.

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25. ISS 003, personal journal entry, September 4, 2021.

26. ISS 004, personal journal entry, September 4, 2021.

27. ISS 007, personal journal entry, September 4, 2021.

28. ISS 008, personal journal entry, September 4, 2021.

29. September 11, 2021.

The session continued the discussion of what are some reminders of solitude and silence. The reminders varied from physical (a waste of time and being too busy), to the idea of contemplatives (the monks and mystics who spend long periods in solitude and silence), to exercise (yoga) to spiritual (a secret place; a place alone with God; listening to the still small voice).

As we discussed the topic of attentiveness there was a reference made to a quote from the book regarding introducing symbols into the time of solitude and silence: "You may want to introduce a physical symbol or religious artifact that speaks to your soul of spiritual reality. For me lighting a candle is a powerful symbol of the reality of the holy spirit present with me in times of solitude."[30] The question was asked: As Pentecostals, should we include this in our practice of solitude and silence? There were mixed feelings from the participants, but many did not see anything wrong with this practice and thought one must recognize that people and cultures are different all over the world and that we must be open and be willing to learn. Some of the responses from the discussion are as follows:

> Absolutely nothing wrong with it. I am one of those who enjoy going to be with the Jewish people. And they have all their symbols and things around. I'm talking about Messianic Jews now who honor Jesus, and I think a lot of my learning and development have come from them. They will just do this bit of sitting in the presence of the Lord and you focus on the candle, and you must look at this light and connect it with Jesus the Son of God. You go on in a positive way. So, everything in life is dependent on how you take it. And you see, we are from a culture to where certain things are taken in a negative light. Personally, I am not going to light it in my setting here, but when I go with them and they have it lit and there in this presence, I'm fine. And even though we are Pentecostals we must learn.[31]

> I think it's also learning to come to unlearn some stuff because even when we begin to study, we realize that some stuff that we held on to for years, nothing doesn't really go like that and so it's a matter of learning to unlearn. We started with a foundation of doing

30. Barton, *Invitation to Solitude and Silence*, 37.

31. ISS 006, personal journal entry, September 11, 2021.

> things in one way, but then as you learn, you realize no, this is not how this goes, so is a mindset of trying to learn.[32]
>
> When I read it first, I did a double take. I read it again and then I reminded myself that we must be open minded and to understand that we are not it. Some things are not defined just by our experiences and our culture because I know the culture that we are from. Candle is associated with a whole myriad of negative things. And so, you know, I had to just remind myself my purpose for having a candle or doing this or that thing is different from how it has been skewed. Because a lot of things that are innocent and well-meaning have been put to very negative views and negative connotations associated with them. You know this is learning. The Lord is enlightening us to change, unlearn and relearn.[33]
>
> The whole conversation bringing me back to the intimate relationship with God, so if it's a relationship for me, when I saw it first, I went back to the whole idea of relics and so, but my mind open. I look at it from a spiritual aspect to say it's entering that worship and spirituality. I thought about what my purpose of the candle would be. I want to have the candle and I said well, I won't be lighting any candles. Not because I don't believe, but I won't be. The impact of culture on our relationship with God and so is that kind of changing. Otherwise, we become what we call cultural myopia. Like oh, we are short-sighted, and we only see our culture. You only see it and then we don't see the broadness of God in different ways. In the flowers in all of this, is God in nature and God in what we do and point it back to what is our purpose? And what was said before? So, I mean, I came back to say it is not about this symbol, it's the purpose.[34]

This week's discussion session concluded with the basic theme of moving away from culture, becoming more aware of one's purpose in solitude and silence, and trying to be open-minded and learning to unlearn.

A question that was included in journal was, What are some of the challenges that you face in sitting still in the presence of the Lord? The same theme was shared by all the participants, who said their main challenge was trying to keep their mind focused and that there was an inability to find the time to spend in solitude and silence.

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32. ISS 008, personal journal entry, September 11, 2021.

33. ISS 003, personal journal entry, September 11, 2021.

34. ISS 005, personal journal entry, September 11, 2021.

The final question that was asked was, How would your desperation and desire for more of God affect the effectiveness of your ministry in the church as you practice solitude and silence? The responses from the journals were as follows:

> Desperations for more of God should positively impact the effectiveness of my ministry at church as my desperation for more of God would pull me to be closer to him. Of course, as we seek God and draw closer to him, we hear more of what he has to say and wants us to do.[35]

> A desire for and seeking after God can only result in a better and closer relationship with him. This will most definitely result in me being more effective in whatever I do including any ministry area I am involved in. With the understanding that whatever I do I am able because it is God who gives me the abilities and strength that is needed for ministry.[36]

> Currently I have a desire to learn more about the Lord and being in his presence. Having a constant desire to be with and be able to please the Lord will help me to be a better disciple for him hence being able to make positive contribution to his ministry.[37]

> The desperation and desire for more of God in this time of practicing solitude and silence will affect my effectiveness in church in a very dynamic way because having an encounter with God through silence and solitude will develop my relationship with him and seeking him will empower me for powerful service.[38]

### Week 3: Solitude and Silence as Awareness[39]

As the project is about solitude and silence, this session was introduced by the facilitator with the practice of "breath prayer" for three minutes. The participants had mixed reactions as they went through the practice. Some found it relaxing, for it allows them to block out distractions. Others still had struggles with concentrating and focusing on the purpose of this practice. The participants were also asked to continue this practice for the week with an increase

35. ISS 002, personal journal entry, September 11, 2021.

36. ISS 003, personal journal entry, September 11, 2021.

37. ISS 007, personal journal entry, September 11, 2021.

38. ISS 008, personal journal entry, September 11, 2021.

39. September 18, 2021.

in the time for each day. They were also asked to journal their experience. Some of the experiences are as follows:

> Decluttering the mind continues to be a daily struggle the use of the breath prayer was new for me but provided some way into maintaining calmness and listening to my own heart and breath made it easier to sit in the moments of solitude and silence each day it was less challenging in terms of the remaining focus but as the time lens the distractions return there was a need to me to keep focus I'm bringing my thoughts into captivity the many distractions were barriers for me. However, it was a worthwhile experience that I would make part of my daily practice and release the mind the running my mind.[40]

> Practicing the breath prayer as made going into solitude and silence an easier experience. The deep breaths allow me to focus more and set aside my concerns. I consider myself to be a person who is most often than not in control of what is happening around me and in my life. Hence, I think going into solitude is difficult for me because I must give up control let go and let God take control.[41]

> The breathing exercises were great in initial stages. Two minutes, four minutes however as the time increase it became more and more difficult.[42]

> Had difficulty finding a comfortable position; kept singing praying consecrate me Lord; fell asleep in the middle; breathing become very relaxed; hyper aware of the sounds around me; still no real experience with God.[43]

> While I did have moments of silence it was just an effort on my part to just be still and give myself a break from the continuous business. It was not the intentional periods of silence to just be in God's presence. Although I was not able to do the silence exercise, I still was able to do my regular devotion and I believe that in this moment God showed up and reassured me that he is with me.[44]

> As I begin the practice it was a struggle, but I persist after taking deep breaths and slowly letting them out saying a one sentence prayer my mind began to slowly adopt to what I was practicing. I realized from this practice that if I give my concerns to God there would be very little for me to worry about and that would allow me to concentrate on God more in silence and solitude.[45]

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40. ISS 005, personal journal entry, September 18, 2021.

41. ISS 007, personal journal entry, September 18, 2021.

42. ISS 004, personal journal entry, September 18, 2021.

43. ISS 002, personal journal entry, September 18, 2021.

44. ISS 003, personal journal entry, September 18, 2021.

45. ISS 008, personal journal entry, September 18, 2021.

As the discussion for the session continued, awareness of the issue of resistance to enter solitude and silence was discussed. Some of the responses during the session are as follows:

> Fear can be a resistance that will cause me to enter solitude and silence. Fear of not knowing what to expect.[46]

> There is just too much vying for my attention. The fact that we are holding so much and don't know what to do with it all can sabotage our efforts to enter in if we don't know how to pay attention and sort it out sums up how this week feels.[47]

> Because of the demands of life. It's not that you don't want to enter solitude and silence, but the demand of life creates the resistance.[48]

> Letting go is hard, and it takes great effort to be in solitude and silence. Due to the demands of life the practice is very hard with all you must do. In spite of the resistance, it is a doable effort.[49]

## Week 4: Solitude and Silence as Rest I[50]

As a norm we started the session with a practice of lectio divina (spiritual reading). This practice was used to explore "that we are never done listening to Scriptures because God never done speaking to us through them."[51]

The first question that the participants were asked was, Where do you see yourself on a "dangerously tired" continuum? The responses were as follows:

> Today we spoke about being dangerously tired I assessed myself to a fallen off the continuum which was more than dangerously tired. I recognize that my dangerously tired condition causes my atmospheric condition to be risky and volatile. Sometimes I feel as if most things are out of control, and I have to be constantly playing catch-up. Relaxation

46. ISS 007, personal journal entry, September 18, 2021.

47. ISS 003, personal journal entry, September 18, 2021.

48. ISS 006, personal journal entry, September 18, 2021.

49. ISS 00A, personal journal entry, September 18, 2021.

50. September 25, 2021.

51. Adam S. McHugh, *The Listening Life: Embracing Attentiveness in a World of Distractions* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2015), 101.

becomes a very rare occurrence in my life and the idea of getting a full day off seems so farfetched.[52]

Think I fell off continuum. I am beyond fully in a state of dangerously tired. This was truly high opening as I did not realize how tired I was. Now I know I need to do something differently as it is neither safe nor healthy to be in this state. The initial thought was I need to do something about this, and my mind became flooded with ideas of how I can fix this. However, as the author stated on page 61, "Don't rush to try to solve our fix anything."[53] I am therefore trying to be patient and think things through before making my drastic moves as this may be detrimental.[54]

On the continuum I find myself drifting towards being dangerously tired and it's a constant struggle to fight against reaching to the state of being fully dangerously tired.[55]

Until now I knew I was very tired exhausted even just did not have the name for it, "dangerously tired." This chapter was very eye-opening Seeing so many of the experiences I was currently having described brought alertness to the need to pay attention. I am in full agreement with the statement on page 58[56] that this state is a result of accumulation over months and months in my case.[57]

To be dangerously tired exposed me to the lions that roar even when they can't bite the bears and elephants and snakes of whom I am giving power to trample on. Now have me clawed and fenced but the triumph of a silent moment with God we energize the permanent battery within me to flow on his protected words. As I looked at my guided book, I quickly realized that my journey to do everything was really a mask in dangerous tiredness more work to eliminate required time in the Word and with God.[58]

On the continuum I am presently drifting toward dangerous tired.[59]
Dangerously tired the point of being burned out. Interestingly, we may not even recognize how tired we are until our bodies cannot bear the burden.[60]

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52. ISS 007, personal journal entry, September 25, 2021.

53. Barton, *Invitation to Solitude and Silence*, 61.

54. ISS 004, personal journal entry, September 25, 2021.

55. ISS 002, personal journal entry, September 25, 2021.

56. Barton, *Invitation to Solitude and Silence*, 58. "It is a chronic inner fatigue accumulating over months and months."

57. ISS 003, personal journal entry, September 25, 2021.

58. ISS 00W, personal journal entry, September 25, 2021.

59. ISS 006, personal journal entry, September 25, 2021.

60. ISS 005, personal journal entry, September 25, 2021.

The main theme from this session was how tired each participant was. The participants now recognized that they cannot enter solitude and silence. Many felt that they are out of control when they are tired and do not know where to start. One participant commented that when we get caught up in our work we cannot hear from God. Constant tiredness and burnout will cause stress. People see it as a point where we must go to God and let him help us to deal with tiredness. The conclusion is that many are dangerously tired and need rest for their bodies.

As the discussion continued, a lot was shared regarding rest for the body, so a question was asked about how they felt about getting the required rest for the body. Many knew that they do needed rest but were unable to do so due to the demands of life. The responses were as follows:

> To rest in God stood out to me because years ago I hear the voice of God said to me rest in me and I keep wondering what you are saying to me God rest in me. I kept looking for Scriptures that talk about rest in God and I pondered the Scriptures, ponder it and I'm saying what does this really mean to rest in God. As we see God, we realize that there's a place in God that we begin to find that comfort, that peace that we begin to trust him. When I think about resting God is that we become secure in him. We talk about rest as having physical rest for our body but when we rest in God is that place where we come to solitude in him just relax.[61]
>
> With tiredness we need rest and if we go back to creation when God was tired, he rested. So that should be an example for us to know that your body is tired you need to rest. So, I think I have benefited the most from these two chapters this week and resting it's something I am going to be doing.[62]
>
> The physical body and spiritual, there's an interconnectedness between both and so sometimes if the body is so tired you can't even access a spiritual part of it. And the tension that we carry, and we feel them all over our bodies and so the physical for me I think is my takeaway. The physical is so tired then the spiritual will go.[63]
>
> I do hear the call of my physical body, but I am good at ignoring it to achieve my goals. Like Ruth Haley Barton, presently I am "hyped up by caffeine," I anticipate the time

61. ISS 008, personal journal entry, September 25, 2021.

62. ISS 004, personal journal entry, September 25, 2021.

63. ISS 005, personal journal entry, September 25, 2021.

> when I will be able to get more rest. After sleeping in the night, it is easier to be alert in morning prayer. I am gaining from relaxation, and breath prayers in times of solitude. It is important to come aside and rest.[64]
>
> Completely out of control and always on the run these symptoms easily masked in the ever busy up tempered activities beautifully seen and accepted and appreciated by everyone but missing the needed rest and restoration needed for the true mission. Not wanted to face the cry of my body for rest and realization another activity is taken on traveling like a vehicle that the brake is cut off and traveling dangerously down and never-ending hill.[65]
>
> I fully believe that God wants me to pay attention to my body without necessary rest and care I will not be of any good use for the work of God or anything else. Even prior to this project I had started to realize that I needed to take steps to slow down and pay more attention to my body. Even with this realization there were time when during the much needed and necessary risk I would suddenly become consumed with the many things that I needed to get done thereby defeating the purpose of the time for rest.[66]
>
> Our bodies/my body is the temple of the Holy Spirit and if I don't take care of it then the Lord will not be able to dwell therein. Hence if God should ask me to pay attention to my body it would simply mean I have been missing this Scripture which I think I really have. I am very comfortable with beginning to care for my body as a spiritual discipline. I think this is how I am going to achieve my goal of being in a closer relationship with the Lord.[67]
>
> I know God has been calling me to take better care of my body by exercising more and eating better. I am sure if I get those in alignment my body will be more rested.[68]

### Week 5: Solitude and Silence as Rest II[69]

In this session we looked at chapters 6 and 7 of the book. These two chapters focused on rest for the soul and rest for the body. As usual, the session begins with a time of reflection in which two Scripture passages were read (for this week, Ps 131:1; Matt 18:3). This time of

64. ISS 006, personal journal entry, September 25, 2021.

65. ISS 00W, personal journal entry, September 25, 2021.

66. ISS 003, personal journal entry, September 25, 2021.

67. ISS 007, personal journal entry, September 25, 2021.

68. ISS 002, personal journal entry, September 25, 2021.

69. October 2, 2021.

reflection was used to engage participants in reflecting on what the Word was saying to them in two minutes. Participants were asked to share at the end, and some of their responses are as follows:

> Alright for me, I reflected on being as a little child just thinking about being humble and needing the Lord.[70]

> That we're like little children where we're not so concerned and bogged down with things, whether they be physical or otherwise, and just know that God has us in his hand, and he will take care of everything that concerns us because he has said that.[71]

> We must be humble as a little child and just relaxing in God's hand. It is easier said than done, but we must try.[72]

> If I could only just release the expectations of what I expect, how things should go, how they should look? And just trust in God for things that I cannot figure out and that are out of my control and just relax in him. Then I think my mind would be more at peace, so the word that kept coming back to me was just trust.[73]

The discussion for this session was not that clear, as some of the participants did not understand the author's reference to the mind and the heart. We struggle as a community to understand this section. One participant stated:

> Distinguishing between the heart and mind was not easy for me and so I thought that they were being used interchangeably in this chapter.[74]

A home-alone practice was given. This practice was listening prayer—sitting still before God, to listen even during the noise around them. Some participants did not do the practice, as they did not get the time. For those who did partake in the practice, their journal responses are as follows:

> Finding a place or time to pray without external distractions is not easy enough most time. The destruction comes from a mind that is actively processing several things at the

70. ISS 004, personal journal entry, October 2, 2021.

71. ISS 003, personal journal entry, October 2, 2021.

72. ISS 008, personal journal entry, October 2, 2021.

73. ISS 002, personal journal entry, October 2, 2021.

74. ISS 005, personal journal entry, October 2, 2021.

> same ranging from unfinished projects both personal and work-related to future planning of various aspects. Daily as my body gets more rest it is becoming easier to quiet my mind knowing that it is not possible to always get everything perfectly right.[75]
>
> Aware of need for lifestyle change, need to set aside more time to be still and know. Effort must be made to satisfy desire for God's presence, can't blame others.[76]
>
> Finding a place to pray without distractions is sometimes difficult. During the week I am most often in a rush to get out of the house on time for work therefore on weekends mainly Saturday mornings I tried to make the time for silence and spend so quiet time in the presence of the Lord. The major struggle I face is blocking out the distractions of everything going around in my mind this I will continue to work on.[77]

## Week 6: Solitude and Silence as Release[78]

Week 6 was another day of rich discussion in which we looked at chapter 8, "Emptiness," and chapter 9, "Facing Ourselves."[79] The practice for the week was breath prayer. Participants were asked to journal their experience with the following introductory lines:

> During my times in silence and solitude today I experienced . . .
>
> These times connected with the rest of my day in the following ways . . .

The responses had common themes.

> During my times in silence and solitude I experienced a calmness and a sense of protection. I was able to let go of my cares and concerns for a few minutes and allow God to be in control. . . . This connection with God sets the tone of my day. Whenever I'm able to unwind in God's presence I experience a day filled with his presence and even when things don't go according to plan it is still a good day.[80]

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75. ISS 003, personal journal entry, October 2, 2021.

76. ISS 006, personal journal entry, October 2, 2021.

77. ISS 004, personal journal entry, October 2, 2021.

78. October 9, 2021 (rescheduled October 23, 2021).

79. Barton, *Invitation to Solitude and Silence*, 85-107.

80. ISS 007, personal journal entry, October 23, 2021.

> During my times in silence and solitude today I experienced comfort knowing that all that I must do can be done through the divine power of Jesus Christ. His divine power has given me everything I need for life godliness.[81]

One question that was asked was, What are the empty places in your life right now—the ones you usually try to avoid? The responses from the journals are as follows:

> For me, it's letting go of those things that keep me busy and surrendering to the will of God. The kind of emptiness in which God strives as mentioned by Ruth Hayley Barton is one where we no longer rely on ourselves but that reliance is now directed to God's ultimate power.[82]

> My major empty place right now is not knowing how to rest my mind. I am consistently thinking about being away from my family. Another empty place is not being able to find a time to do the things that I really want to do that will bring me the fulfillment that I desire. Also not allowing myself to say no when or before I get to the point of being overwhelmed.[83]

> My empty places in my life right now those expectations I have that seems farfetched, disappointments I have experienced and the pain they have caused. To have a true connection with God all these emotions have to be laid out before him and I am open and ready to receive his presence.[84]

Another question was, How did you experience the presence of God (or not) in the midst of your emptiness?

> Whenever I'm in the presence of God I have no sense of being ashamed to express my struggles because I know that he is the only one who can help me to overcome whatever I am going through. God is not the one to judge hence it allows a sense of comfort knowing that you are not being judged.[85]

> Emptiness could not only consume us and let us seek things but the emptiness inside, that longing inside to find God. God is always willing fill those empty parts of our lives that we must be filled. Even in those moments of unresolved relationships God can fill that emptiness and help us to get over the pain associated with them. When we empty

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81. ISS 002, personal journal entry, October 23, 2021.

82. ISS 005, personal journal entry, October 23, 2021.

83. ISS 004, personal journal entry, October 23, 2021.

84. ISS 007, personal journal entry, October 23, 2021.

85. ISS 007, personal journal entry, October 23, 2021.

> ourselves to be filled by God, we can begin to see how we can overcome those things that once caused us pain.[86]

> The emptiness sometimes tends to create a feeling of desperation and frustration. It is just to find that place of turn around just knowing when to give in to what the body is showing are saying to me.[87]

## Week 7: Day Retreat[88]

The participants were given a chance to experience God by means of a day retreat. The retreat was planned, and all participants were on board. Participants were given an outline to prepare for this retreat day.

The goal was for the retreat to begin at 8 a.m. and end at 5 p.m. Participants were asked not to take their phones, check emails, or watch television. They were to cease from doing work. The day's schedule included a silent lunch and a silent breakfast. Participants were encouraged to take walks, rest, relax, reflect, notice, and listen to what God was doing as they sought communion with him. At the end the participants were to journal their experience and set goals that were impressed upon them. There was no communication with participants; it was a time to practice solitude and silence. The participants had different experiences from the day of preparation to the end of the retreat.

As participants prepared for retreat many had different ideas, as they did not know what to expect. Some were anxious, and many faced distractions before they got to the hotel. These experiences were written in the participants' journals.

> Honestly going into this retreat, I was very anxious. I have never spent any protracted length of time in solitude and silence, and I was dreading the experience.[89]

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86. ISS 005, personal journal entry, October 23, 2021.

87. ISS 004, personal journal entry, October 23, 2021.

88. October 16, 2021.

89. ISS 002, personal journal entry, October 16, 2021.

> October 15, 2021, it's past bedtime but the rush is on to get several things done since tomorrow is the day for solitude and silence. Just then a call came—church concerns re pandemic and a positive attendee. Discussion, calls made, went to sleep in the wee hours of the morning.[90]

> I mean, at first, I was thinking that can I really go through a day?[91]

> As for me, I felt a bit scared. Not that I wasn't used to being alone because I spent a lot of time alone, but you know, just alone. It was my choice. To be alone, but to know that I'm going to be there around people and just not being able to talk. I didn't know how I was going to get through it. But you know, I trusted the Lord.[92]

> I didn't know I could do the length I'm not accustomed to going away from my house, I love my yard and Saturday is my sacred day so giving it up was a big sacrifice. I did a few mumblings here and there and I'm kind of thinking, am I going to burn out at noon because that's the maximum I will go to do anything? So, for me it was myself that I was most in conflict with and my time. Can I go through? Can I do this?[93]

The need for rest on the retreat was evident. Many of the participants found it strange that they got a nap. Many shared their concern that they are not usually a day sleeper but were surprised that they fell asleep. Some of the responses from the journals are as follows:

> I started reading Proverbs 1:5 and it speak to me; the Proverb says let the wise listen and add to their learning and let the discerning get guidance and that verse stays with me right through. Right through to say you have been busy, you need a stop. Where ever you're if you are going to get wisdom, stop and calm. I got into my reading which was very interesting and has prompted me to do lots and lots of soul searching. And by the time I started with the first part and got to the second page. I fell asleep, for a long time and then I said it not only was it rest for the spirit, but for the body.[94]

> Now enjoying solitude and silence but what really matters is the presence of the Lord . . . prayed and didn't know when sleep took over. Tired body needed rest, asleep dreaming that I was sharing about Elijah who fell asleep in his solitude. Awakened by the ringing

90. ISS 006, personal journal entry, October 16, 2021.

91. ISS 007, personal journal entry, October 16, 2021.

92. ISS 004, personal journal entry, October 16, 2021.

93. ISS 005, personal journal entry, October 16, 2021.

94. ISS 005, personal journal entry, October 16, 2021.

> of the phone, discombobulated, had to search for phone. How long have I been sleeping?[95]
>
> The day was relaxing and restful. It was an opportunity to be away from the usual "noise" of daily life; this includes phone, tv and happenings of a typical day.[96]
>
> My body and soul and mind are all tired. Its due to a combination of factors and this day has shown me how important it is to slow down and rest.[97]
>
> Rest why would I rest because rest is critical for the soul important for accomplishing of the missions and the renewed necessary for revitalization a tired body and mind will and can prevent the true revelation of one's full potential those rest is significant for the soul.[98]

It is so interesting that not many participants referred to the silent lunch and the silent breakfast. Could this be that they did not take the time to notice, even though it was used as a means of entertaining the presence of God and thinking about the food that they were eating?

> The practice of sitting together in silence during and after a meal is a bit weird. It feels unnatural as we are accustomed to fellowshipping and talking especially over meals. It's the only part of the exercise I have not enjoyed so far.[99]
>
> October 16, 2021—day for solitude and silence, arrived at hotel, went to assigned room—nice clean space and invited presence of the Lord. Went to breakfast, ate and gave thanks while eating, endeavoring to focus on our God, no communication with peers, strange but decided to ignore them all even my spouse. My senses were activated—as I tasted the food and became very conscious of the fact that I had food – blessed and thankful, felt sorry for those without.
>
> Now 1:25—late for lunch. Got ready to go for lunch. Felt odd when I walked into the room, but settled down, gave thanks for food and started to eat. The body does crave food and drink.[100]

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95. ISS 006, personal journal entry, October 16, 2021.

96. ISS 003, personal journal entry, October 16, 2021.

97. ISS 002, personal journal entry, October 16, 2021.

98. ISS 00W, personal journal entry, October 16, 2021.

99. ISS 002, personal journal entry, October 16, 2021.

100. ISS 006, personal journal entry, October 16, 2021.

Another experience shared by the participants was their ability to notice what was happening to them and what was going on around them. Many saw God's nature in a different light. The responses from the journal were as follows.

> During this time in solitude, I am aware of the fact that I need to get back to taking better care of my body. By doing so, all the other areas of my life will come into alignment.[101]

> As I prove in my silent mind traveling to the lower floor from my room I hear the singing of the elevator moving through its tracks did you speak to me in my place yes it did just as I really guide through the still water of a hotel building the stillness of the walls on either sides kept the focus until I came upon the shouting off the wall piece that almost take me away from my silent moment this silent moment has become a part of my lifestyle even for now my newfound love.[102]

> Even in the silent solitude movement the main machines and activities fight very hard to draw out this beautiful connection between me and God's nature thank you Lord for your blessings on me.[103]

> The day also afforded me the opportunity to walk around for a bit and just relax. The beauty of God's creation without any distractions. During the short time outside walking around was able to observe the trees just blowing gently in the wind also notice the calmness of the sea with its varying colors from the shore as far as I could see. Also took notice of other persons who were outside, the noise and sound though caused me to retreat to the stillness and the peace of the hotel rooms.[104]

> After breakfast I walked along the seaside singing softly "How great thou art," looked at God's beautiful creation and what I describe as the blue water of the Caribbean Sea, heard waves dashing back and forth, thought how God in control, set boundaries allowing the water them to come this far and no further—they are obedient to his will. I felt at peace—walked back and forth enjoying the sun, claiming natural vitamins. I also reflected on the trips I make to other Caribbean Islands for ministry, seeing the needs of people and trying to encourage faith in God.[105]

During the day of retreat participants used the Scripture, the goodness of God, and their different experiences as reflection for the day. The responses from the journals are as follows:

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101. ISS 002, personal journal entry, October 16, 2021.

102. ISS 00W, personal journal entry, October 16, 2021.

103. ISS 00W, personal journal entry, October 16, 2021.

104. ISS 003, personal journal entry, October 16, 2021.

105. ISS 006, personal journal entry, October 16, 2021.

I'm currently making this entry at 11:40 am, and I have already decided that I will be doing this at least once per quarter. I haven't checked my phone once, I haven't felt the need to open a book to read, I haven't felt the desire to listen to any music. It's just me, my thoughts, God, pen, paper and the Bible and I love it.[106]

I stopped to silently listen to the music of the seawater blending with the music provided by the surface supplied really contrasting with each other everyone in their different spots attending to that which caught their attention, but I will fully turn a blind eye to the occurrences around me but silently listen to God at work through the leaves that are randomly available the chirping of the birds and the insects that provide this therapeutic soul.[107]

My reflection begins on Acts 4. Reflecting on this Scripture has taken me down many avenues. I prayed and asked God what he was saying to me through this passage of Scripture as there were so many different areas of focus.

Reflection on retreat—I have spent several days alone throughout my life. The experience of this day was a new experience. I felt blessed to have been in the presence of the Lord where he could have my full attention.[108]

Back in reserved room, myself and God, looked out the window at the many vehicles speeding along the road. Assumed my position in bed reflected on how different and worthwhile it was to take a break to reflect, pray and read the Word. Focused on the peace and fullness of joy that can be found in the presence of God. Prayed, sensed calm, the richness of God's presence, His greatness, my limited self, his faithfulness, my unfaithfulness, his consistency, my inconsistency. Thought about the study of the Word and prayer as important spiritual disciplines, the vehicles to take me into the very presence of God. Disciplines are habits, practices designed to develop, the spirit / inner life/character.[109]

Afternoon was better, now rested, was more alert as I read, reflected, and prayed. Felt shalom of God, had many thoughts but not a direct Rhema word from God.[110]

I also reflected on who God is in time of silence. I was reminded that God is always here with us, it's just for us, it's just for us to recognize and acknowledge him. He knows me intimately, hence I cannot hide anything from him. So, I poured out my heart to the Lord. I expressed my gratitude and thankfulness for where God has taken me from, what he has

106. ISS 002, personal journal entry, October 16, 2021.

107. ISS 00W, personal journal entry, October 16, 2021.

108. ISS 004, personal journal entry, October 16, 2021.

109. ISS 006, personal journal entry, October 16, 2021.

110. ISS 006, personal journal entry, October 16, 2021.

been doing in my life physically and spiritually and the way he has kept my family together.[111]

But for me the reflection is a long time, I have not been alone physically but being alone with God and myself. Where I pray and pray again and read more things and think about what that means for me and search through my life and went down on my knees and fall down on my face. So, for me it's a long time. I mean that kind of intimacy (without cell phone) with God. Has not happened for me. We are not the loneliness and it's not being us away, but that being with God in that intense manner where I'm looking at this picture where I'm thinking about it.[112]

Participants wrote about the encouragement they received from being on the day of retreat.

4:22pm I honestly saying this was a good day. I did not know I would enjoy this so much. It was a refreshing experience one that helped my body and my mind.

I am looking forward to greater experiences in solitude and silence and I am waiting to see what God will do in me and through me because of this experience.[113]

It was a beneficial day that also reinforced my decision to take one day of each week usually a Saturday to first relax and release from the usual business of life.[114]

Having this much time to spend reflecting on the purpose of the Scripture was very rewarding and I will try to make this a lifestyle, hence my goal to make the necessary adjustments so that I will have the time for silence and solitude.[115]

## Week 8: Solitude and Silence as Refocusing[116]

To refocus is to accept where we are and accept what God wants for us. At this point we hand over everything to God and know that he has called us to intimacy with him. In chapters 10

111. ISS 007, personal journal entry, October 16, 2021.

112. ISS 005, personal journal entry, October 16, 2021.

113. ISS 002, personal journal entry, October 16, 2021.

114. ISS 003, personal journal entry, October 16, 2021.

115. ISS 004, personal journal entry, October 16, 2021.

116. October 30, 2021.

and 11 Barton shares the main result when we are refocusing.[117] She speaks about letting go of what is holding us back from entering God's presence and seeking ways to entertain his presence. This is where transformation starts: the renewing of our minds. We now see the need to connect with God on a regular basis. In refocusing we become more conscious that nothing we do should be done of our own but that in seeking God in solitude and silence we can receive his guidance.

For this week the participants were given the opportunity to read the two chapters and answer the questions for the week. These questions were to explore whether participants have seen solitude and silence from a different perspective.

In practicing solitude and silence the participants were asked to choose one of the following practices: breath prayer, listening prayer, lectio divina, contemplative Bible reading, silence (being still), or retreat. They were asked, How useful was this practice? Would you continue to use it as a preparation in solitude and silence? Were there any challenges and/or limitations? As was the norm throughout the project, not many of the participants had much to say about any of the practices. For those who responded, their journal entries were as follows:

> The challenge with the practice of solitude and silence is consistency. Contemplative Bible reading is something that I believe I could easily do as it becomes ritual. A quarterly silent retreat is also something I am planning to incorporate as well as I see how beneficial it can be. I am not sure about being able to maintain the breath prayer practice though.[118]

> Contemplative Bible reading is a useful and beneficial way to read and assimilate the Word of God. It causes one to be focused and purposeful in reading God's Word. This method resulted in the Word becoming alive and greater understanding in what the Word is speaking to us is achieved.[119]

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117. Barton, *Invitation to Solitude and Silence*, chaps. 10 and 11, 108-25.

118. ISS 002, personal journal entry, October 30, 2021.

119. ISS 003, personal journal entry, October 30, 2021.

> Breath prayer has helped me a lot when going into solitude it makes transitioning from the chaos into silence a much smoother process. I have been experiencing the grace of almighty God as I go deeper into solitude and silence in that I have been able to focus more on him and pull myself away from the care of my everyday life.[120]

The second question that the participants were asked was, Is there some truth within yourself that you need to face bravely? This question was asked to see whether the participants will be willing to let go of self and turn everything over to God, just as Elijah did. The responses are as follows:

> I'm experiencing more and more that God will meet me where I am. Whether I practice solitude and silence every day or not does not change God's love for me. His love is unfailing and never changing. However, I need to face the truth that there is a pull to something more and something greater. I know God has called me to do more for his kingdom and sometimes it scares me. By facing this truth, I have accepted that I am currently not at the place where I need to be. More discipline in the Word, prayer, and fasting is needed. I don't think I need more guidance in these areas. It's just a matter of acting and of setting up and doing what I know I need to do.[121]

> I would not say that I have a truth to face but I do have fears and most of these fears have to do with me being away from my family especially my children who really do need my presence in their lives right now. I'm learning to trust God to take care of my needs so yes there is hope. I am usually very anxious about being away from my kids, but I have learned to trust God with my problems, so I am gradually moving away from being anxious so allowing God to take control.[122]

> Even in those moments of unresolved relationships God can fill that emptiness and help us to get over the pain associated with them. When we empty ourselves to be filled by God, we can begin to see how we can overcome those things that once caused us pain.[123]

The third question that the participants were asked was, How has your practice of solitude and silence helped you to become more familiar with God's voice?[124] The responses were as follows:

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120. ISS 007, personal journal entry, October 30, 2021.

121. ISS 002, personal journal entry, October 30, 2021.

122. ISS 007, personal journal entry, October 30, 2021.

123. ISS 005, personal journal entry, October 30, 2021.

> I don't believe solitude and silence has helped me to become more familiar with God's voice yet or maybe I should say I haven't noticed a big difference yet. More practice may be needed on my part for me to see a big difference in this area. God still speaks to me through his Word and listening is still small voice. But I haven't noticed a big difference otherwise.[125]
>
> The times of solitude and silence have been very fruitful in being able to hear God speaking whether it was through reading his Word, meditation, or times of prayer with times of silence included for God to speak. Also, just a general attitude of being calm and at peace have allowed me to hear God's voice more clearly. There is also the full realization that the intent of solitude and silence is not meant to be a permanent ongoing state more so a discipline to be affected and use for recharging and providing strength for this Christian journey as we seek to walk in the fullness of God's purpose for my life.[126]
>
> My practice of solitude and silence has given me the opportunity to slow down the thoughts inside my head and it has also allowed me to spend time in the presence of God. I do have conversations with the Lord when in solitude and silence but I'm still practicing listening so I can ear and recognize when he speaks. I hold fast to the Scripture that says my sheep knows my voice hence I'm trying to maintain that relationship with God so that I will know when he speaks. The busyness of my life and schedule has slowed me down somewhat and of such I have not accomplished as much as I would have loved but, nonetheless.[127]

## Follow Up

The meeting with participants ended on October 23, 2021, with a home study by participants for the week ending October 31, 2021. The participants were encouraged to continue to practice the discipline of solitude and silence. On January 30, 2022, the participants were asked to give feedback on their journey into solitude and silence. Hence participants were asked to answer four questions, and the responses were communicated by an email from the participants.

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124. The question is based on Barton, *Invitation to Solitude and Silence*, 119. "The capacity to recognize the voice of God through the ministry of the Holy Spirit arises out of friendship with God that is sustained through prayer, silent listening and attentiveness to all that is going on outside us, inside us, and between us and God."

125. ISS 002, personal journal entry, October 30, 2021.

126. ISS 003, personal journal entry, October 30, 2021.

127. ISS 007, personal journal entry, October 30, 2021.

The first question was, In all the things discussed, what motivated you most to keep solitude and silence?

> The inner peace that it brings to me. I got a chance to stop and blocked out the inner and outer noise.[128]

> Being present with others, all on the same journey yet there were times of withdrawal from social engagement. I have a personal desire to embrace spiritual discipline that will enhance development of growth spiritually.[129]

> Honestly I have not been motivated to keep up with the habit. However, when life gets overwhelming, I do find that going back to that place of getting quiet really helps.[130]

> My motivation came from the group of participants and learning that it was a very good discipline to practice also from the experience described by the author of the book.[131]

> Any time spent with and in the presence of God. It is even more valuable when we hear from God. Being silent and focused on God allows Him to speak to me. If I am speaking or distracted, I will not be able to hear or discern what He is saying. Stillness is a major ingredient in hearing the voice of God.[132]

The second question was, What was most helpful for you to cease from in order to have a solitude and silence mindset?

> Knowing the benefits that can be gained from practicing the discipline.[133]

> Less attention to non-essentials, e.g., messages on phone. Being deliberate about how time is spent, saying no to some things.[134]

> I'm not sure how to answer this question as I have not been practicing the habit consistently.[135]

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128. ISS 005, email, January 30, 2022.

129. ISS 006, email, January 30, 2022.

130. ISS 002, email, January 30, 2022.

131. ISS 008, email, January 30, 2022.

132. ISS 003, email, January 30, 2022.

133. ISS 005, email, January 30, 2022.

134. ISS 006, email, January 30, 2022.

135. ISS 002, email, January 30, 2022.

The most important thing for me to cease from was my everyday chores my busy lifestyle.[136]

The third question was, What made you hang in there or hang it up?

As mentioned, the peace that it brings to me and the inner connection that it allowed me to feel. So, whilst I was pressed for time I kept pushing forward.[137]

I was willing to hang in there because of the spiritual benefit gained from the focus in the very first session. I was motivated by the organized approach to the project and the bond I sensed being a part of a group that together we were deliberate in our effort.[138]

I wouldn't say I hung it up. However, I have not been as intentional as I should about the practice. As with any new habit, it takes consistency to build the habit and I have not been intentional about creating this consistency.[139]

What made me hang in there was the regular meetings that we had the encouragement from each other and the benefits I was getting because in silent and solitude it helped me to listen more and to be still in the presence of God.[140]

Hang in there as it adds to the quality of my time spent with God, I speak to Him but I also listen to Him. What He has to say to me will always supersede anything I can say to Him.[141]

The final question was, What would have helped you really commit to keeping solitude and silence?

I would say retreats—the retreat provided a space for me to be free from the outer distractions and control my inner thoughts.[142]

I was assisted by the synergy of the group, appropriate, relevant reading material, and occasional retreat (one day) as was done by the group.[143]

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136. ISS 008, email, January 30, 2022.

137. ISS 005, email, January 30, 2022.

138. ISS 006, email, January 30, 2022.

139. ISS 002, email, January 30, 2022.

140. ISS 008, email, January 30, 2022.

141. ISS 003, email, January 30, 2022.

142. ISS 005, email, January 30, 2022.

143. ISS 006, email, January 30, 2022.

A monthly group check in. Accountability helps in establishing any habit, and I believe that's what I am missing.[144]

More education and more meetings as a group and practicing this precious.[145]

N/A as solitude and silence is still an important part of my time with God.[146]

## Evaluation of the Project

The project was completed and met its desired results. The group met to discuss and share about the discipline of solitude and silence. The challenges and limitations that the group participants experienced were shared and captured in this project. At this time of writing, only eight of ten participants returned their journals.

From conversation and other means of feedback I found the participants struggle to practice the discipline of solitude and silence due to the demands of their daily life. However, some try to do it when they get a chance. The hustle and bustle of this society has captured the mindset of people and impedes the ability to slow down. There is always something to do, and people are all in a hurry.

The use of *Invitation to Solitude and Silence* by Barton played a helpful part in this project. It provided more than just information; it also gave practical guidance to help participants in solitude and silence and provided the questions. The responses to those questions have been shared in the project. The study shows that solitude and silence is a discipline, not a one-time event. It takes practice and the desire to want to be in communion with God. During the study it was clear that participants were able to face themselves and acknowledge where they are and their need for transformation. The facilitator has now grasped that this discipline is doable

144. ISS 002, email, January 30, 2022.

145. ISS 008, email, January 30, 2022.

146. ISS 003, email, January 30, 2022.

but there are challenges that participants face. Now that this fact has been identified there should be some means of helping participants and the wider community of believers to embrace the discipline of solitude and silence.

The participants did embrace the exercise of journaling, but not all understood what was required by the facilitator. This should have been explained, as not all the participants responded to the journal questions asked. In other words, the questions were not directly answered, as some participants' reflection was more on a chapter-by-chapter basis. The challenge to get information in this form was quite interesting, as I had to read through to find the answers to the questions being asked. The facilitator had to think through the thoughts that were written in the journals.

It must be noted that the practices of the exercises given during the weekly studies were hard for the participants. From the information gathered it is evident that only a few of the participants did the exercises. The lesson learned from the meeting sessions is that the participants connected with the discussion. Had the facilitator known that, more questions could have been asked during the meeting sessions, as participants felt free to express themselves during these sessions.

The retreat was one area where the participants were able to capture the different exercises, as their distractions were limited. However, the retreat would have been more effective if it was conducted in a more secluded area away from the busy road. Due to availability for this purpose this was not possible.

Participants were encouraged to keep in touch with the facilitator for guidance in practicing the discipline of solitude and silence. The relationships between the facilitator and the participants have grown, and we are able to be open to each other and share as we go on in our spiritual journey.

In concluding, the project was effective as it identifies the challenges that limits spiritual formation in the practice of solitude and silence. It is at this point the facilitator could analyze and put in place a strategy to help participants and the wide community of believers to embrace the discipline of solitude and silence. An attempt to put this in place will be discussed in the next chapter.

# CHAPTER FIVE

# THE NEED FOR SPIRITUAL FORMATION THROUGH THE DISCIPLINE OF SOLITUDE AND SILENCE

This project reveals the need for encouraging spiritual formation in the body of Christ through the discipline of solitude and silence. From creation until now it was always God's intention to keep fellowship with his children. Due to the fall, there has been a deviation; however, through the blood of Jesus Christ this relationship was reinstated. It is with this in mind that this chapter is written. The study showed that the busyness of life and all the demands required of believers in Cayman society have hindered the building of relationship with God. But how would these findings affect the church community? What can be done for a change to be embraced? A proposed Bible study series will be outlined as a solution to the problem.

## Results of the Study

From this project it is evident that work has outstripped the time one should spend with God. Many are so busy and always on the move that they have no time to practice spiritual exercises on a regular basis. Time is always of an essence.

The project sought an understanding of what the participants thought about solitude and silence and what they were expecting. It has revealed that of the eight participants who responded, the majority see solitude and silence as a time for being quiet and getting away from the busyness of life. This showed that participants were aware that there needs to be a time of quietness in the presence of the Lord. The anticipation that the participants had in committing to

the project varied: some were willing to spend more time with God, others wondered what would be the effect on their life, and one played it safe as to be open minded.

The project also revealed that participants face many distractions in practicing solitude and silence. These include but are not limited to noise, both internal and external; technology; the demands of one's job; the demands of family; and being always busy. In our culture people believe that doing more work is better than resting. The project also found that participants were unable to find a place and time to pray due to the distractions.

The project also shows that full understanding of the discipline of solitude and silence was not clear, and hence participants were reluctant to enter the process. A lack of knowledge about something will have a dampening effect on a person's ability to experience new ways of being in the presence of God. The main theme gathered from the participants was that they wanted to be able to hear from God and to have a new lease on life. As the project continued, participants had difficulty listening to and hearing the voice of God. The project revealed that participants found solitude and silence a hard discipline to keep. There was inability to capture their minds and stay focused on God.

Participants assumed that resting would make them feel lazy, and they found it difficult to stay quiet. The need for rest was not well received, as it is the assumption by most that "I am here to do a job and the job must be done." They are so focused on their means of making a living that they ignore the need for rest.

The project also revealed that due to lack of knowledge, participants concluded it is better to unlearn some things and learn new concepts as they relate to spiritual formation. Introduction of a new exercise can become one that is not embraced—for instance, the burning of a candle during solitude and silence. This could be seen as something other than the main purpose of

entertaining the presence of God. In our culture, such practices would be seen as working witchcraft. One will tend to ignore the discipline when there is not sufficient knowledge and understanding of the matter being addressed.

The project also revealed that the use of symbols in times of solitude is not what the participants would likely do; however, most of them recognized that there is a need to be open-minded, as different cultures and different denominations use various symbols as a means of welcoming God's presence. The focus should be that the purpose of solitude and silence is to be in the presence of God.

As spiritual exercises were introduced during solitude and silence, participants were comforted and guided by God on the days that the practice was done. However, the participants had problems letting go of distractions and allowing God to take full control. The need to surrender all and to trust God was very evident.

As the participants were given a day of retreat, the participants were able to recognize how much they need rest. Many who had problems resting were able to embrace time to sleep. The participants were anxious as they prepared for this retreat. Their expectancy was limited, as it was the first time they were going on a retreat; some experienced fear of the unknown. The project also revealed that the participants' level of awareness of what God was doing was limited.

The project also revealed that as participants were on the retreat, study and meditation on the Word became much clearer to them. They expressed how God ministered to them through the Word and that they were able to reflect on a verse or verses during the day, which they found to be very rewarding. Their time of reflection about the retreat was that participants were encouraged to do this more often.

The project revealed that the spiritual exercises (lectio divina, contemplative Bible reading, listening prayer, breath prayer, stillness) included as practice were not fully embraced by the participants. When the practices were done in meetings, all the participants took part in spite of the challenges that they faced in doing something new. However, when the exercises were given as a home assignment, the responses were limited.

## What the Results Mean for Solitude and Silence in the Church of God of Prophecy Grand Cayman

If believers are not being transformed by practicing the spiritual disciplines, then there will be a stagnant church. There will be no growth, and the same problems will always surface. Solitude and silence should not be looked at as a taboo, but as God's invitation to be in his presence as he seeks fellowship with us.

For a congregation that celebrates enthusiasm and always expects something to happen, people will not accept this discipline—it would be considered too quiet. What the community of believers will have to acknowledge is that God speaks in many forms and there are times he wants us to be silent and be in his presence. The practice of solitude and silence can be done within the church body, but members will have to accept that there is a need for change. This will include a need to learn. Accepting where we are, we can enter the presence of God through the practice of solitude and silence.

As the writer of this project, I did not accept the discipline when it was first introduced to me. It was after practice, guidance from God, and increased knowledge that I embraced such a discipline. Desire and determination for more of God can be aided by this practice. Relationship

is built when one gets to know the other party in the relationship. Any relationship or communication should be seen as two persons involved at any one time.

## How Can This Lack of Relationship Be Changed?

This lack of relationship could be changed by introducing studies on spiritual formation to local churches with an emphasis on the discipline of solitude and silence. In my own congregation, the Christian Education Committee (comprised of myself, the pastor, and others) would be the most likely group to facilitate this kind of study, perhaps as a Bible study series. Small-group leaders would be given an outline of meetings to provide a context for the practice of the spiritual discipline of solitude and silence. At the end of each month leaders will meet to share the outcome of the meetings. At the end of three months members could be asked for individual feedback by means of a survey.

Another means could be conducting a Bible study series on "Spiritual Formation: The Discipline of Solitude and Silence." As a Christian education director, it would be important for me to make leaders aware that the discipline was experienced by persons in the Bible, particularly by Jesus himself. This could be best done during a time when schools are not in session, as this will allow the congregants to be less busy and be able to be more involved.

## Proposed Action for Ministry Leaders

Christian leaders will need to spend more time in the presence of the Lord for efficient and effective ministry. Spending time in solitude and silence not only empowers leaders but also gives guidance as to the leading of the ministry they are involved in. This exercise should become a part of the rhythm of the day and not be done haphazardly. As leaders spend time in

the presence of the Lord, we are made aware of what God is saying to us individually and what he wants the other members of the ministry to hear.

In seeking God, Christian leaders must come to recognize that they cannot depend upon self but upon God. Trusting God is what matters in times of solitude and silence. Spiritual formation will be enhanced as they practice being in the presence of God in times of solitude and silence. The aim of the Christian leader is to be transformed in the likeness of Christ, and this was exemplified by Christ being away with God while here on earth. His ministry was fruitful.

However, even though we all have busy lives, some form of adjustment will have to be made to foster the discipline of solitude and silence. Christian leaders will have to place their schedules in the hands of God and depend on him. The more time we spend with God the more time we will have to do the task we set out to do. In embracing the discipline of solitude and silence leaders will come upon distractions and challenges but will have to find ways of dealing with them. It was evident from the project that there were difficulties as well as successes as the practice was done. These distraction and challenges should not hinder an individual from entering the discipline of solitude and silence.

The purpose of practicing the discipline should always be foremost in our minds. And if this is the case, being in the presence of God will build a relationship with him, which should encourage Christian leaders to want to be a part of the discipline. From the study it is evident that many found it hard to do the discipline on their own. Hence Christian leaders should practice the discipline in community (e.g., small groups) and then do the practice on their own.

Purpose is the key, and the key to this discipline is being in the presence of God, listening in silence to hear his still small voice. People should not get dismayed if they find it hard to settle into a time of solitude and silence. The life of the believer should be one of sanctification, and

this is a process which takes discipline and trust in the one who can transform us, the triune God. The leaders who participated in the project should be the ones used to help those who find it difficult to practice the discipline. They could volunteer to be mentors or teachers for a small group and would guide according to their experience. The benefits and challenges should be pointed out, but people must be given teaching on how to overcome them.

This process of teaching or mentoring will take time and care. The teachers or mentors would share what they learned during their time of solitude and silence. Then they can encourage the group members that the discipline can be accomplished by trusting God himself through the process. This practical experience of the teachers would engage the group. Leaders would have to continue in solitude and silence to receive clear guidance from God to be effective to the group members. However, the teaching must be both theological and practical. So, one would bear in mind that the discipline is new to the group. The result is that during and after teaching one will have a better understanding of the discipline and will be willing to continue one's own. In the process there may arise obstacles in carrying out the practical and theological guidance, but one must bear in mind the purpose of practicing the discipline. The Word of God makes it clear that one perishes because of the lack of knowledge. The discipline fosters relationship with God; hence there are going to be hindrances, but we must continue to cast our cares upon God and let him take care.

In relation to rest Christian leaders will need to take rest to be effective and efficient in ministry. A life of hindrances and no time to slow down can cause one to be at a point of becoming dangerously tired. Christian leaders must embrace the gift of rest, which comes from God. Rest will empower leaders and cause them to be alert in what they are doing in ministry. It would be good for Christian leaders to take time to exercise, taking slow walks, jogging, or

going to the gym. In these times they will notice what is happening around them and be more attentive to and aware of the presence of God. Christian leaders must encourage their members to take rest for the body. Rest is a gift from God, and it takes trusting God to take care of everything else when we receive rest. The rest that should be incorporated in our lives as believers should be both spiritual and physical.

God introduce the gift of rest from the foundation of the earth. He worked six days and rested on the seventh day. One might find it hard to take this rest, but this can be done when Christian leaders can acknowledge that God has delivered us from being slaves. To continue to work without slowing down will give the impression that we are still under bondage and being driven by the taskmasters. However, we must acknowledge that we are no longer under the taskmaster but under the leadership of the triune God and must embrace the gift of rest.

A time for a retreat should be a part of Christian leaders' life: to get away from the busyness of life and to embrace being in the presence of God, to notice, to be aware and attentive to his presence. As Christian leaders embrace retreats, they too can introduce this to other members of their congregation and share their experience with them. Sabbatical rest brings joy. But if they attempt this on their own it might become a burden. Christen leaders who do not rest will become dangerously tired, so much so that they cannot even pray. The life of a Christian is to bear fruit; hence a life of hurriedness becomes fruitless. Christian leaders must spend time in the presence of the Lord, which is the source of their fruitful life. Christian leaders must exemplify that God is the power and source of life and must be the center of our being. Regular retreats should be a part of the church curriculum where each ministerial team could take time to spend in the presence of the Lord.

In a practical sense the Christian leaders leading the small-group ministry should share the passages of Scripture regarding Sabbath, relating it as a benefit in practicing the discipline of solitude and silence. And the congregation would be reminded that Jesus himself took Sabbath rest, and in doing so he was able to bring glory to the Father, performing great miracles and wonders during his ministry here on earth. As Christian leaders who are transforming in the likeness of Christ, we would embrace a time of solitude and silence when we take time to rest in God alone. Christian leaders who embrace rest here on earth will accept eternal rest knowing that our eternal life begins here on earth. Christian leaders must teach why we need to cease from work and to rest. If as leaders we embrace resting for what it is, then many will not take it as wasting time but as time spent with God in the discipline of solitude and silence.

Practical application of the spiritual exercises (lectio divina, contemplative Bible reading, listening prayer, breath prayer, stillness) could be introduced on a regular basis in our small groups and in our worship services. Worship service leaders could read the Word of God more slowly, asking the congregation to listen attentively. Upon finishing the reading of the Word, the congregation could enter a minute of silence and then end the session with each person praying according to what they hear from God. When these exercises are practiced in community, they will become much easier to be done on an individual basis. Listening is the focus in solitude and silence, so Christian leaders must encourage the practice of listening to God, for when we listen and hear we become obedient to God. These exercises might not be welcomed by all, but as they are regularly practiced the resistance will change to acceptance of the discipline.

Many of these exercises also help Christian leaders to concentrate. Many times, the distractions are severe, but the leaders can persevere. They need to keep in mind that they are in the practice, and eventually the things that keep coming up will leave. The reading of the

Scripture slowly can also settle our minds from distractions. As we pay attention to every word and phrase, our minds will then be able to focus upon God. With the breath prayer one will be able to slow down and calm oneself from anxiety by taking time to breathe. Christian leaders will have to remember the purpose of practicing solitude and silence and not be perturbed about whether they hear from God or not. We must leave it to God, remembering that it is a discipline that requires practice.

## What This Means for Other Churches in the Cayman Islands

The need to be in the presence of God is not coming back in this society until members of the society recognize the need for living in the presence of God. Christian leaders must recognize that the continuous hurried life will not foster the presence of God or lead to spiritual formation in individuals.

There is the need for churches to practice the presence of God and not just to have a worship service. In a society where people believe that the more they do, the more they will achieve, we should not facilitate this attitude among ourselves. God is seeking relationship, and relationship involves spending time, listening, being attentive and obedient. The plans for church services will have to be less programmed and more inclined toward the move of the Holy Spirit doing what he wants to be done.

To break the spirit of prayerlessness the churches will have to come to agreement, bring their congregations together, and point out the need to speak to God and have the time to allow him to speak back to us. God has different ways to communicate with us, but it takes a listening ear. The practice of the spiritual disciplines and solitude should be introduced into the churches. Leaders will need to give correct theological understanding and introduce practical experiences

within the times of meeting. The churches should teach Sabbath not as a legalistic tradition but as one which was formulated by God, for the children of God to find rest in him alone.

A collaborative effort between the churches, especially the Pentecostal churches in the island, could organize a study on the discipline of solitude and silence. This could be done by studying books such as *Invitation to Solitude and Silence* by Ruth Haley Barton, *Thoughts in Solitude* by Thomas Merton, *The Way of the Heart* by Henri Nouwen, *An Unhurried life* by Alan Fadling, and *Invitation to Retreat* by Ruth Haley Barton. These books and many others will give practical guidance in the discipline of solitude and silence with the Word of God being first and foremost.

## Suggested Approach to Spiritual Formation

## with Emphasis on the Discipline of Solitude and Silence

The following outline sets out different units that can be used as a guide for development for spiritual formation with emphasis on solitude and silence in the local church. The leaders will first be gathered, and the format of the suggested approach will be explained. The group will be comprised of Christian education teachers, the pastor, and ministers of the church.

**Unit I: General background**

I. What is solitude and silence? (theoretical concept of the topic)—Session 1

II. The benefits of practicing solitude

A. You will be energized and able to take on tasks you have. When Elijah was driven into solitude, he rested for the journey ahead of him. Consider the role of a pastor who embraces solitude. If a radio is

plugged into a source, the radio will always be going if there is a connection to electricity.

B. It helps with the fruit of patience. At times we must sit and wait until the Lord speaks. Ruth Haley Barton states, "My frustration intensifies when I realize that I am caught: caught between my need for what I am waiting for and my impatience with waiting."[1]

C. A time of solitude helps individuals to be aware of what is happening around them. Thoughts and distractions of all sorts will come, but in solitude we become aware of them and can cast them upon the Lord.

D. A time of solitude helps individuals to be aware of what is happening around them. Thoughts and distractions of all sorts will come, but in solitude we become aware of them and can cast them upon the Lord. Hence a moment of trust is embraced. Students could be asked to place their cares and distractions on a piece of paper and then place them into an envelope marked "TRUST." This would enable them to be in the presence of God.

E. A time of solitude help us not to become fearful but to accept that God is with us and that he will accept us with our faults. All we have to do is release them in his hands. The journey might seem lonely, but it is a part of seeking. Ask students to think about a time when they felt alone and what were their reactions.

1. Ruth Haley Barton, *Invitation to Solitude and Silence: Experiencing God's Transforming Presence* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2018), 95.

F. It helps in seeking guidance as we spend time in the presence of God. We become more attentive to what he is doing, accepting that he is our guide.

**Unit II: Theological framework**

I. The discipline of solitude—Session 2

A. Form small groups and have the members of the group discuss biblical characters who spend time in solitude in preparation for their ministry. The main purpose of this discussion is to identify the importance of taking time to be in the presence of God to be effective in ministry.

B. Old Testament—Session 3

1. Moses was led into the wilderness where he spent forty years before he was given the task of leading the children of Israel out of Egypt. He was able to speak to God face to face (Exod 33:11).
2. David spent time as a shepherd in the fields but was later made king over God's people.

C. New Testament—Session 4

1. John the Baptist spent time in the wilderness and was a forerunner of Jesus Christ.
2. Paul was prepared by God for three years before he was sent out to share the gospel (Gal 1:17-18).

D. New Testament—Session 5

1. Jesus: Ask the group to discuss the different times Jesus withdrew for service and identify the impact it had on his ministry.
    a. Jesus, who is God, withdrew to the wilderness and was tempted by the devil (Luke 4:1-3).
    b. Jesus spent time in solitude before he chose the twelve disciples (Luke 6:12).
    c. Jesus withdrew in times of great opposition to his ministry (Matt 14:13)
    d. Jesus drew away to pray by himself after he completed a great task (Matt 14:23).
    e. Jesus withdrew just before the time for him to go to the cross (Matt 26:36-46).

II. The discipline of silence—Session 6
    A. One must recognize that God speaks. In spite of our situation God speaks, whether in trial or triumph.
    B. The purpose of silence is to hear God and to listen to what he is saying.
    C. How can one listen? God speaks through many means, but it is for us to listen.
    D. Listening—Session 7
        1. Listening to God: Elijah listened to God as he was in silence (1 Kgs 19:11-13). Elijah heard the still small voice. The exercise

of listening in praying could be introduced. This will aid students to take the time to listen to God.

2. Listening to Scripture: the Word gives guidance because God speaks through his words. Ask the students to spend some time reading a passage of Scripture slowly in silence and listening to what God is saying through the Scriptures. This will help one to practice the discipline of silence through listening.
3. Listening to creation
    a. Take notice of God's wonderful creation (Ps 8:3-4; Ps 29:3-9; Matt 6:26-30). Students could be encouraged to take slow, silent walks or sit in solitude and silence and listen to the wonders of creation. Take creation for what it is.
    b. Listen to the universe (Ps 19:1-4). Here the students will understand that the universe speaks to us. God's creation speaks of the goodness of God.
4. Listening to others: God speaks to us as we take time to listen to others. Students could be placed in small groups where individuals will share their spiritual journey in brief. Those listening will say in a few words about what they are hearing (due to expressions, body language, or repeated words). A prayer in unison could be done for the individual after this.

**Unit III: Application**

I. Practicing solitude and silence—Session 8

A. **Personal** regular daily intervals of five to ten minutes of silence and solitude.

1. Find a room and the time to be in solitude and silence.
2. Begin solitude and silence with five minutes.
3. Remain relax and comfortable in the presence of the Lord.
4. Repeat a simple prayer as you sit in the presence of God: Help, Lord! Merciful God! Speak, Lord, thy servant listens!
5. After time is up close with a prayer of thanksgiving or pray the Lord's Prayer.
6. Remember this is practice of a discipline. Do not judge yourself. Bear in mind the purpose is seeking deep relationship with God.

B. **In community**, practicing listening to God and listening to each other in solitude and silence.

1. The group leader will start with a time of silence asking God for guidance.
2. Group members share according to the topic being discussed. As one person speaks, other members will listen with their whole heart. What is heard will be prayed about quietly. Each person in the group will be a speaker and a listener.

3. Close in silence, taking note on what has been shared and received.

C. **Day** retreat—Session 9

1. Make plans when going on retreat. Plans must include but not be limited to identifying the place for the retreat. Remember your purpose on the retreat is to be closer to God. Be prepared with basic needs and other articles that would be required while on retreat. If it is possible, leave all devices behind; if not, keep them turned off.
2. Retreat focus
    a. Word—an introduction of contemplative Bible reading would be encouraged, by means of lectio divina (spiritual reading).
    b. Prayer—an assigned prayer time. Facilitator will encourage the group to meet at a fixed hour of the day: in the morning, noon, and at the end of the day.
    c. Reflection—at the time of slowing down the group will be encouraged to reflect on God and the need of spiritual nourishment. Here the group members will be advised that there is a need to be attentive to God's Spirit and take notice of what is happening as they reflect.

3. Have a daily schedule but remember that God should be the focus. Below is a suggested daily schedule by Ruth Haley Barton.
    a. “Silence upon waking” for being present to God; have an open and receptive posture
    b. Shower and dress
    c. Morning prayer
    d. Breakfast
    e. A walk before or after breakfast
    f. Spiritual reading and journaling
    g. Spiritual direction, if available; follow the guidance given
    h. Midday prayer
    i. Lunch
    j. Nap
    k. Walking meditation or more strenuous activity like a run, a hike, or working out with weights
    l. Spiritual reading, reflection on Scripture, journaling that might be more focused on the intention you have brought into retreat
    m. Evening prayer
    n. Dinner

o. Reading for pleasure—poetry or a novel. Watch the sunset. Listen to music. An activity you would enjoy just for the pleasure of it.

p. Prayerful reflection on what God has said to you today and how you are responding. Make notes or write in your journal to capture the insights and learnings of this day.

q. Night prayer

r. Bath or shower if that would help you relax

s. To bed[2]

## Conclusion

The topic "The Limitation for Spiritual Formation: Challenges in Experiencing Solitude and Silence" was chosen because at my introduction to spiritual formation I did not know that there was more to the transformation of the believer's life. As stated in chapter 1, I was really excited by the topic. In my first residency project I was able to see how work affects rest, and so my project done was in that line. My second residency in Italy was a turning point for me, and hence I aimed to dig deeper in the study of solitude and silence. The experiences gained have impacted my life tremendously. Throughout and as it continues, I am being spiritually transformed in the image of Christ.

It was my desire to have others on this journey, which is why I chose this project. The project was not easy as I started, but with determination and the desire to meet God I kept going.

2. Ruth Haley Barton, *Invitation to Retreat: The Gift and Necessity of Time Away with God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2018), 145-46.

Solitude and silence is a discipline and is not accomplished in one day. Solitude and silence involve challenges. The busyness of life does have an impact on the time spent in solitude and silence. Even though there are challenges, one must seek to entertain the discipline of solitude and silence, as it will enable us to get in the presence of God. It is evident that it is possible, and therefore we must keep reminding ourselves that it is about communion with God. One pioneer in earlier times refers to it as "practicing the presence of God."[3] During the noise and distraction, we can capture our mind to stay focused on the presence of God. This must be a constant desire of the heart and can be achieved.

From the project and the findings, I conclude that there is a need to emphasize the discipline of solitude and silence as it relates to Scripture. In the Scriptures are different characters who went into solitude and silence as they became involved in ministry. Jesus Christ exemplified this in his ministry while he was on earth, and a look at Scripture in this sense will bring awareness to leaders and members that the discipline does exist. The Word declares that people perish because of lack of knowledge. With the acknowledgment that God speaks, it is our response to listen. This response is limited to listening but also includes being aware and attentive to what is happening around us. Listening comes from a pure heart which is focused on the desire of being in God's presence. It is through relationship with the triune God that we will be able to hear from him, and this is seen all throughout the Scriptures. As a Christian leader who struggles with entering a time of solitude and silence, it would be an honor for me to share with other leaders through my experiences. I would point out that hurriedness can affect depth in fellowship with God, while acknowledging that distraction and work affect solitude and silence.

3. Brother Lawrence and Frank Laubach, *Practicing His Presence: One of the Greatest Pieces of Christian Literature of all Time*, The Library of Spiritual Classics (Jacksonville, FL: SeedSowers Publishing, 1985); Laubach's work is a rewriting of Brother Lawrence, *The Practice of the Presence of God*, first published in French in 1692.

The Scripture is there as a road map to show how work affects time spent with God. However, God has commanded his children to rest from our labors, recognizing we are no longer under the rule of taskmasters and are free. Where there is freedom there is liberty.

The books that were read for this project were both theoretical and practical, and some were based on theological substance. The theories were helpful in practicing the discipline, as it makes understanding much clearer. Some authors listed many of the challenges that hinder a Christian leader from practicing the discipline of solitude and silence. Some have mentioned ways these challenges could be limited. There will always be challenges, but the discipline can be accomplished with a made-up mind and by allowing the triune God to transform us. It is through trust and desire for God that a discipline can be accomplished. However, because many people have different daily schedules, the practice of the discipline might not be practicable at a set time. Hence carrying out the practice in a community would be best exercised in group discussions or a retreat.

The research set out to explore that the practice of solitude and silence will improve spiritual formation. The project has identified some of the challenges that hinder the practice of solitude and silence. It has been noted that if leaders grasp their desire for God, identify the challenges, and make the necessary arrangements to overcome these challenges, then the spiritual discipline of solitude and silence would become more doable. The busyness of life does hinder one's time to rest in God. If the understanding is grasped that rest is not separated from work, then time for solitude and silence would be better appreciated. To find time to practice the discipline during a busy day is much harder to accomplish than the time taken to spend the whole day in a retreat. Hence it is my desire that as Christian leaders we should do what works best for

individuals in such a busy society. Giving up should never be an option. Christ commands relationship, and out of relationship comes one being transformed into the image of Jesus Christ.

Finally, until the discipline is thought about and shared in our settings, Christians will not understand the need for the discipline. The discipline, when embraced by Christian leaders, should also be shared with other Christians so they too can embrace and practice the discipline of solitude and silence.

# APPENDIX

## PRESENTATION FOR SESSION 1 OF GROUP MEETINGS

These slides are formatted as handouts.

Slide 1

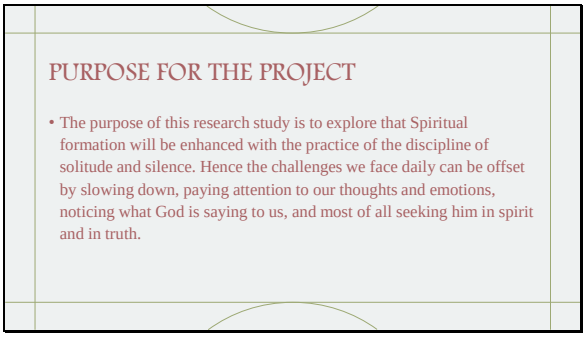
Slide 2

Slide 3

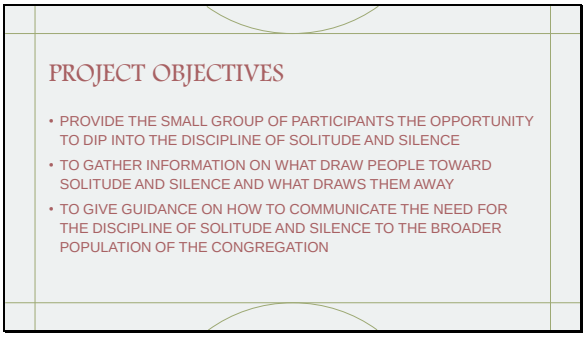
SHARING
SILENCE
THIS GUIDE IS TO PROVIDE YOU WITH A WAY OF SHARING YOUR EXPERIENCES IN SOLITUDE AND SILENCE WITH OTHERS WHO ARE ALSO ON THIS JOURNEY
SILENCE HELPS TO CALM THE INNER NOISE AND CHAOS SO THAT WE CAN LISTEN BETTER TO THE VOICE OF GOD.
OUR MAIN FOCUS IS TO BUILD RELATIONSHIP DEVOTED TO PAYING ATTENTION TO THE INVITATIONS OF GOD IN EACH PERSON'S LIFE AND SUPPORTING ONE ANOTHER IN MAKING A FAITHFUL RESPONSE
THE MOST IMPORTANT COMMITMENT EACH PERSON NEEDS TO MAKE TO THIS JOURNEY IS THAT THEY WILL READ THE ASSIGNED CHAPTER AND DO THE PRACTISE

Slide 4

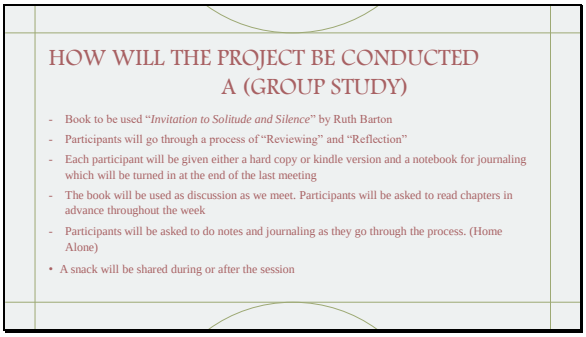
Slide 5


PURPOSE FOR THE PROJECT
• The purpose of this research study is to explore that Spiritual formation will be enhanced with the practice of the discipline of solitude and silence. Hence the challenges we face daily can be offset by slowing down, paying attention to our thoughts and emotions, noticing what God is saying to us, and most of all seeking him in spirit and in truth.

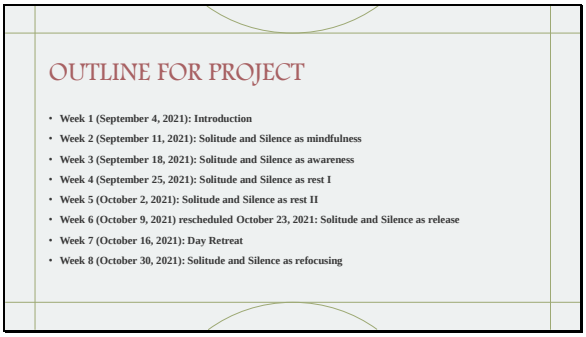
Slide 6


PROJECT OBJECTIVES
• PROVIDE THE SMALL GROUP OF PARTICIPANTS THE OPPORTUNITY TO DIP INTO THE DISCIPLINE OF SOLITUDE AND SILENCE
• TO GATHER INFORMATION ON WHAT DRAW PEOPLE TOWARD SOLITUDE AND SILENCE AND WHAT DRAWS THEM AWAY
• TO GIVE GUIDANCE ON HOW TO COMMUNICATE THE NEED FOR THE DISCIPLINE OF SOLITUDE AND SILENCE TO THE BROADER POPULATION OF THE CONGREGATION

Slide 7

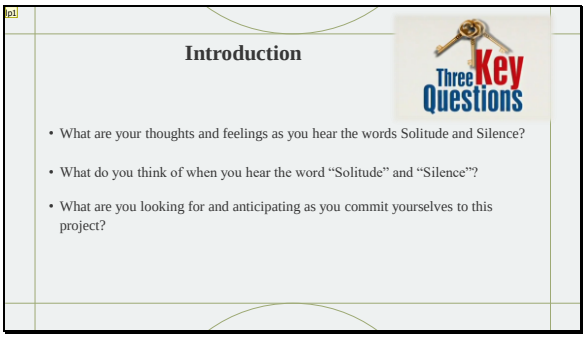

HOW WILL THE PROJECT BE CONDUCTED
A (GROUP STUDY)
- Book to be used "*Invitation to Solitude and Silence*" by Ruth Barton
- Participants will go through a process of "Reviewing" and "Reflection"
- Each participant will be given either a hard copy or kindle version and a notebook for journaling which will be turned in at the end of the last meeting
- The book will be used as discussion as we meet. Participants will be asked to read chapters in advance throughout the week
- Participants will be asked to do notes and journaling as they go through the process. (Home Alone)
• A snack will be shared during or after the session

Slide 8

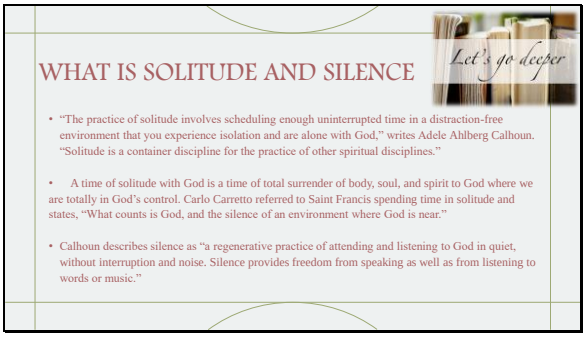

OUTLINE FOR PROJECT
• **Week 1 (September 4, 2021): Introduction**
• **Week 2 (September 11, 2021): Solitude and Silence as mindfulness**
• **Week 3 (September 18, 2021): Solitude and Silence as awareness**
• **Week 4 (September 25, 2021): Solitude and Silence as rest I**
• **Week 5 (October 2, 2021): Solitude and Silence as rest II**
• **Week 6 (October 9, 2021) rescheduled October 23, 2021: Solitude and Silence as release**
• **Week 7 (October 16, 2021): Day Retreat**
• **Week 8 (October 30, 2021): Solitude and Silence as refocusing**

Slide 9

Slide 10


Introduction
Three Key Questions
• What are your thoughts and feelings as you hear the words Solitude and Silence?
• What do you think of when you hear the word "Solitude" and "Silence"?
• What are you looking for and anticipating as you commit yourselves to this project?

Slide 11


WHAT IS SOLITUDE AND SILENCE
Let's go deeper
• "The practice of solitude involves scheduling enough uninterrupted time in a distraction-free environment that you experience isolation and are alone with God," writes Adele Ahlberg Calhoun. "Solitude is a container discipline for the practice of other spiritual disciplines."
• A time of solitude with God is a time of total surrender of body, soul, and spirit to God where we are totally in God's control. Carlo Carretto referred to Saint Francis spending time in solitude and states, "What counts is God, and the silence of an environment where God is near."
• Calhoun describes silence as "a regenerative practice of attending and listening to God in quiet, without interruption and noise. Silence provides freedom from speaking as well as from listening to words or music."

Slide 12

"*Invitation to Solitude and Silence*" by Ruth Barton

## FOREWARD

- **IN THE FOREWARD DALLAS WILLARD QUOTES BLAISE PASCAL AS SAYING THAT:**

"All the unhappiness of men arises from one simple fact that they cannot stay quietly in their own room, so they turn to diversions to distract themselves." (pg. 11) That's a pretty bold statement! He goes on to say that even when we attempt to rest, we are confused and "aim at rest through excitement" – in other words through more stimulation.

**Application:**

How do you see evidence of this in our culture and in your own life?

Slide 13

## A SNAPSHOT FROM THE INTRODUCTION

**THE AUTHOR SHARES HER OWN STRUGGLE TO TRUST HERSELF, SHE STATED:**

"The mystery that is God in the silent places beyond all the things I think I should know." She acknowledges the "inner demons" of desire to perform, to be seen as competent, productive, culturally relevant and balance as major obstacles to this journey." (pg. 16)

**Application:**

**??? Can you relate? 1) What are some of these distractions that you notice in your own life that prevent you from entering solitude and silence? 2) How are you experiencing God's invitation to you during these challenges?**

Slide 14

What are you going to take with you from today?

Slide 15

Slide 16

Slide 17

Thank you for coming,
I really appreciate your time and effort,
You came and rejoiced,
The ambiance was filled with cheer,
I don't have anything else to say,
But, thanks for coming my dear!

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# VITA

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